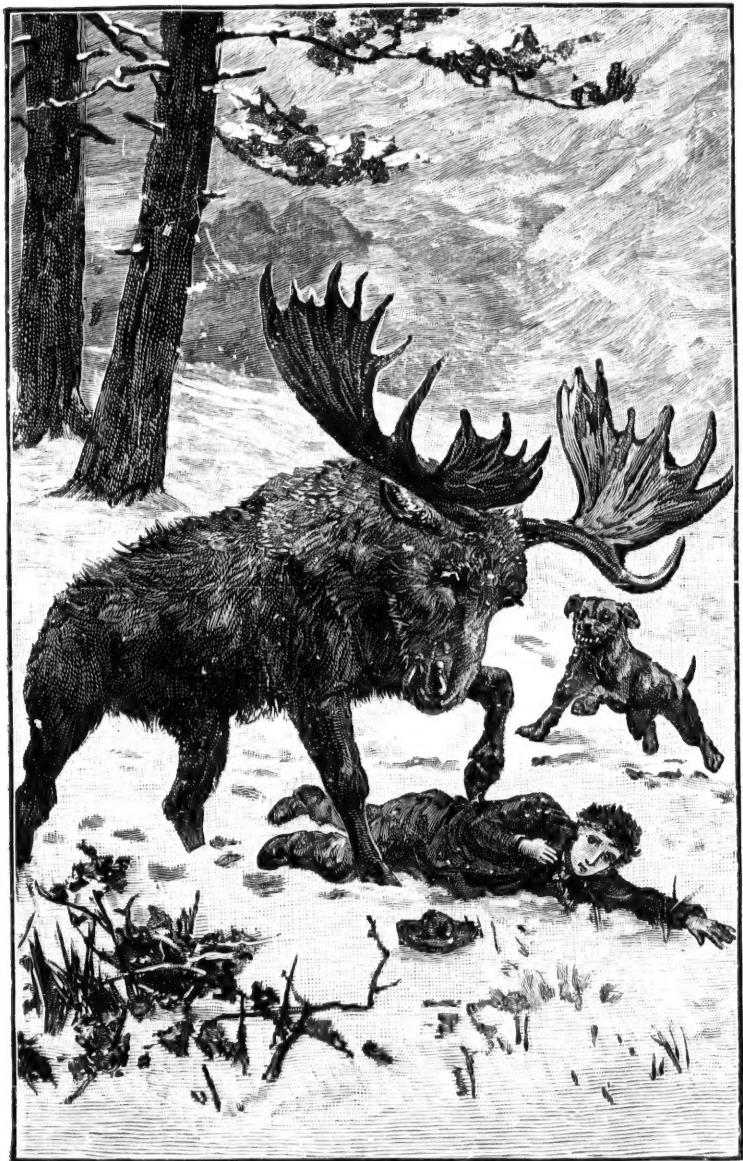




017

HE FELT THE CREATURE'S HOT BREATH ON HIS NECK

Page 182

Hal Hungerford

The Strange Adventures of a
Boy Emigrant

BY

J. R. HUTCHINSON, B.A.

Author of "Back to Life" "Decoyed" &c.

Illustrated

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
LONDON AND GLASGOW

PR6015

U79H3

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED

50 Old Bailey, London

17 Stanhope Street, Glasgow

BLACKIE & SON (INDIA) LIMITED

Warwick House, Fort Street, Bombay

BLACKIE & SON (CANADA) LIMITED

1118 Bay Street, Toronto

Printed in Great Britain by Blackie & Son, Ltd., Glasgow

CONTENTS

CHAP.	Page
I. HAL ARRIVES AT HIS NEW HOME, ...	7
II. HAL MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE "TICKLER,"	19
III. LITTLE TOM PROVES HIMSELF GOOD FOR SOMETHING,	29
IV. WHAT HAPPENED TO HAL AT THE CIRCUS, . . .	40
V. THE FLIGHT ON THE EBB TIDE, ...	53
VI. PICKED UP—THE ESCAPE FROM THE SMUGGLER, .	63
VII. RUN DOWN—THE OLD BLOCK-HOUSE, ...	75
VIII. KING COLE THE HERMIT, ...	86
IX. DEAD-MAN'S CAVE, ...	95
X. "WHITE BOY, INJUN—ALL ONE BROTHER," . .	103
XI. THE HAND UNDER THE BLOCK-HOUSE DOOR, . .	113
XII. "BUT D'LIVER US,"	121
XIII. THE DEATH OF LITTLE TOM, ...	126
XIV. THE HERMIT HOISTS HIS TRUE COLOURS, . . .	135
XV. TELLS HOW HAL GOT OUT OF A TIGHT PLACE, .	144
XVI. HAL PAYS A VISIT TO THE "SQUIRE," . . .	152

CHAP.	Page
XVII. THE SMUGGLERS LAND THEIR LAST CARGO, . .	161
XVIII. THE CAPTURE OF THE "NANCY LEE," . . .	169
XIX. HAL MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIS FIRST MOOSE,	177
XX. LOST IN THE SNOWY FOREST, ...	184
XXI. THE RESCUE, ...	190
XXII. JOHN BULL RUNS AN ENEMY TO EARTH, . .	197
XXIII. HAL HEARS AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF NEWS, .	206
XXIV. HAL MAKES A NEW FRIEND OF AN OLD ENEMY,	212
XXV. "SQUIRE HAL,"	221

Page
161

169

177

184

190

197

206

212

221

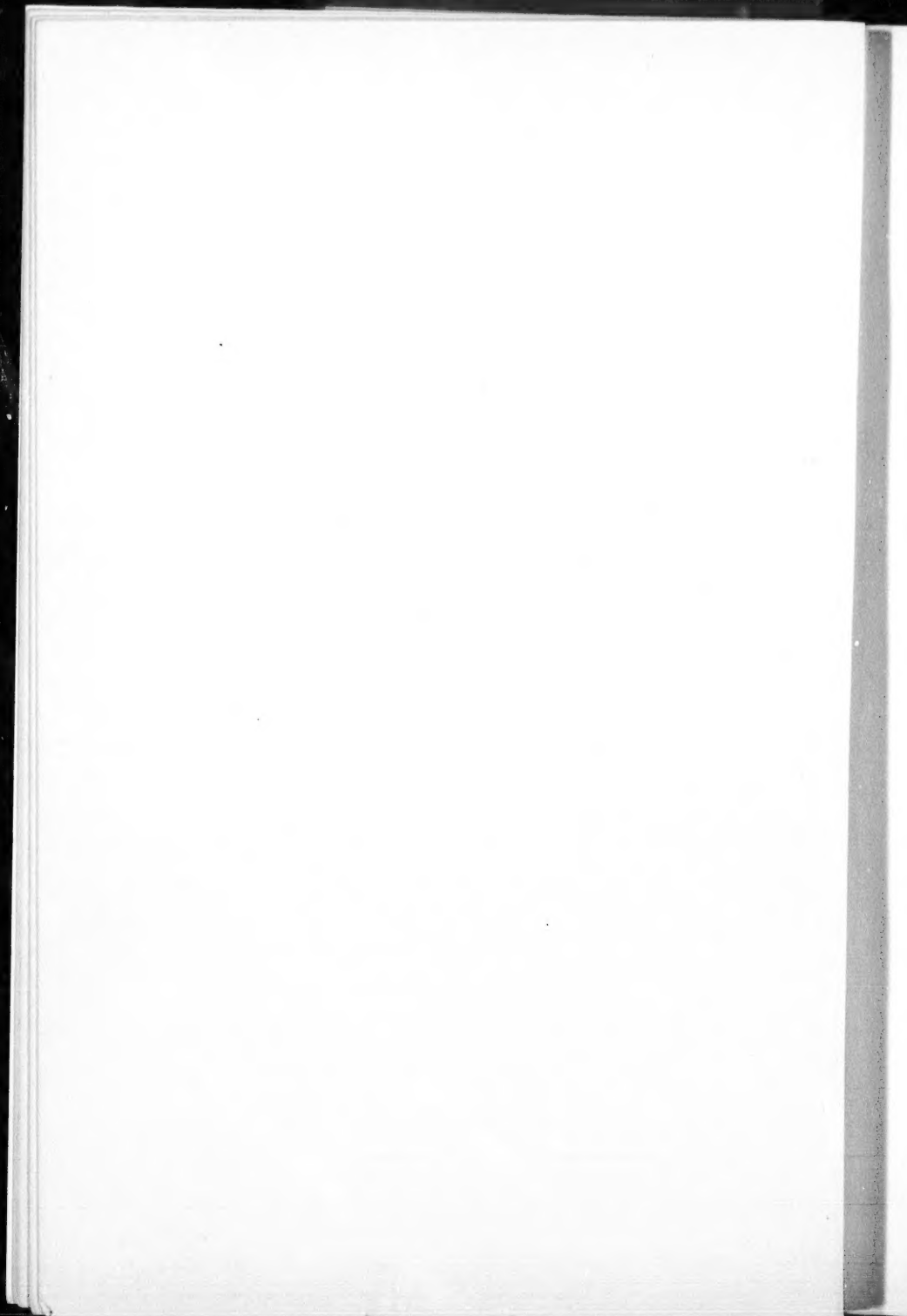
ILLUSTRATIONS

HE FELT THE CREATURE'S HOT BREATH ON HIS NECK
Frontispiece

Facing
Page

BEN CHEISTMAS BURSTS INTO THE BURNING BLOCK-
HOUSE 120

JOHN BULL'S VENGEANCE 200



HAL HUNGERFORD

CHAPTER I

HAL ARRIVES AT HIS NEW HOME

HULLO, lads! How do you find yourselves?" cried a hearty voice as the gangway of the Anchor Liner *Scotia* was run out upon the Halifax pier and a middle-aged gentleman with a lame leg hobbled aboard. "Tired of life on the ocean wave, hey? No more salt-junk or sea-sickness for us, say you! Well, small blame to you! I'm Dr. Grey, the immigration agent, and you're Dr. Barnardo's boys, I take it. Boxes all up?"

"All up, sir," replied one of the group of boys addressed, who stood on the steamer's forward deck; "there they are, sir," touching his cap as he pointed to a number of small deal chests, each of which was neatly corded and marked with its owner's name.

"And what is your name, my lad?" asked the doctor.

"Hal Hungerford, sir."

"Hum! You're Hal, are you?" said the doctor, looking the boy over from his clustering brown curls to his coarse shoes. "Now, boys," he added, addressing the others, "look alive! Spry's the word if you're to get a footing in Canada. Shoulder boxes and after me!"

The doctor made for the gangway, the boys following as nimbly as squirrels close upon his heels. No more climbing the companion of the dark, stuffy steerage for them! Before them lay a new world, a land of promise, where, they had heard, the meanest might become great and the poorest rich.

Out at sea, past the grim fortifications bristling on shore and island, lay a great fog-bank, in which the steamer had groped and rolled so long that her spars and ropes were all a-drip. But on the harbour, with its forest of shipping, on the town above, and on the wooded hills of Nova Scotia beyond, a late September sunshine lay bright and warm. "Welcome!" it seemed to say to the young strangers; "fair days and many of them!"

All was bustle on the pier, and many a curious and kindly glance was cast upon the fresh faces, the neat but coarse clothes, and the comfortable-looking boxes of the boy immigrants.

"Hal Hungerford!" shouted the doctor; "where are you, Hal?"

"Here, sir," replied Hal, pressing forward.

"This is the boy, Farmer Tomson," said the doctor, addressing a countryman who stood beside him.

Farmer Tomson ejected a small torrent of tobacco juice from his mouth, and looked Hal over critically. "Wal," he slowly drawled after this survey, "I kalkilate he'll do, mister."

"And you won't forget the terms of your agreement, I am sure, Farmer Tomson. Food and clothing, schooling in the winter, and instruction in farming. As to kind treatment, the lad is sure of that with you. I hear that Hal is a well-disposed lad, and I think he will suit you."

Farmer Tomson puckered up his lips and aimed another torrent of tobacco juice at a knot-hole in the planks. Then he screwed up his eyes and looked at Hal again. "Wal," he replied in his deliberate nasal tones, "es I sed jest now, I reckon he'll do. He don't know nothin' about farmin', I guess. Them 'Nardo boys never des. An' I s'pose he'll eat a tarnation heap arter this ship v'i'ge. Won't be wuth his keep for a month or so; howsumever, I makes it a pint to feed all my critters well, beasteses an' humans. He'll git what the rest gits—plenty salt pork an' pertaties, an' corn bread an' skim m'lk, sayin' nothin' of buckwheat slapjacks. But I don't consarn myself about sech matters—them's the old woman's look-out. An' as for doin' my dooty by a pore boy, why, I'm a elder in the Methodis S'ciety up our way. Next to

farmin' an' cheese-makin', religion's my strong pint, mister."

"Well, well," laughed the doctor, "we won't dispute that: only do what's right by the lad. Hal," he added, turning to the boy, "say good-bye to your friends. You are to go with Farmer Tomson here."

Hal was much abashed at this piece of news. "Ain't I going with the rest, sir?" he asked half imploringly.

"No, my boy; the others go to different parts of the country. I have found you a home with this worthy farmer."

With tears in his eyes Hal turned to his companions and sorrowfully bade them farewell. He had known none of them longer than a few months; some, only on that voyage. But he counted them all as friends, the only friends he had in the world, and it was hard to leave them at a moment's notice, perhaps never to look into the face of one of their number again. Hardest of all was the thought of facing a strange world alone.

But Hal knew that Farmer Tomson's ferret eyes were upon him; so he forced the tears back, and shouldering his box followed the farmer up the wharf.

"That's my team, young un," said the farmer, pointing to a strong farm-waggon drawn by two stout, well-fed horses; "pile in and let's be off. There's forty odd mile of road afore us, an' the old woman 'll be crusty if supper's kep' waitin'."

After a few kindly words of advice and a warm

hand-shake from the doctor, Hal mounted the waggon and took his place beside his new master on the cross-board which formed a rude spring-seat. The farmer gathered up the reins, cracked his whip, and they were off.

The horses, scenting home and feed, pricked up their ears and took the road at a rattling trot. Soon the town was left behind, the forest closed in on one side of the way, while a chain of lovely blue lakes bordered the other. The farmer, exchanging a short black pipe for his tobacco quid, smoked in silence. Occasionally he took the pipe from his teeth to bid the horses "g' lang," but not a word did he address to Hal.

At last he thrust the pipe in his pocket, and turning his sharp eyes on the boy asked abruptly, "Kin you milk?"

Hal stared, and not understanding the question made no reply.

"Kin you milk a cow?" the farmer repeated.

"No," said Hal, "I don't know nothing about cows."

"Hum!" said the farmer, "I kalkilated so. I reckon you don't know how to chop wood, nuther!"

"No," replied Hal, with the utmost candour, "I don't."

"Or how to drive hosses?"

Hal acknowledged his utter ignorance of driving horses.

"Or how to dig pertaties?"

This was also a mystery to Hal, and he said so.

"Hum!" said Farmer Tomson again; then he drew a plug of tobacco from his waistcoat pocket, bit off a piece, and masticated it reflectively for some moments. "Where was you brought up?" he asked at length.

"I was never brought up at all," replied Hal, thinking the question applied to a police court.

"Wal," cried the farmer with a laugh, "if that don't beat all! You can't milk, you can't chop, you can't drive, you can't dig, an' you've hed no bringin' up! But I might 'a' knowed. T'other un can't nuther. Them 'Nardo boys ain't never good for nothin', 'cept to eat. You ken eat, I s'pose?"

"Yes," said Hal cheerfully, "I know how to eat."

"Wal, look here, now," said the farmer, turning suddenly on him; "I ain't druv all the way to Halifax, an' tuk all this trouble to git a 'Nardo boy jest to eat me out of house an' home, hev I? I'm a hard-workin' man myself, an' so's my old woman. I'm a elder in the Methodis S'ciety, too, an' I'll do the right thing by you if you des the right thing by me. I'll feed you well—plenty of porridge an' 'lasses, an' pork an' beans, an' pumpkin pies, an' heaps of table things I dessay you never heerd on. But you'll hev to work for it."

"All right!" said Hal, by no means abashed by the prospect; "I'll do my best."

"But what air you a-goin' to do, if you can't do nothin'?" asked the farmer.

"I'm going to learn," said Hal in determined tones.

"That's the talk!" cried the farmer, much pleased.

"Why, when t'other un kem he couldn't so much es draw a bucket of water. But he's larned, an' now he's wuth his keep a'most. Mother wouldn't let him go on no 'count. He's jest as good as a gal 'bout the house, she sez."

Hal looked hard at the farmer and noted his gray hair and the stoop which age had given his broad shoulders. "I have no mother, sir," he said; "your's must be a rare old un."

The farmer laughed a husky laugh, then coughed under pretence that a bit of tobacco had stuck in his throat; but Hal saw a tear glisten in the eye nearest him.

"No, boy," he said presently in softer tones; "I didn't mean my nateral mother. It's ten year come next New-year since she died—God bless her! You see, it's a way I hev of speakin' of my missus. The young folks allus useter call her mother, an' somehow I kinder drop into it nateral like."

From that moment a kindlier feeling seemed to spring up in the old farmer's heart towards the boy wanderer at his side. The fact that Hal had lost his mother, touched him as perhaps nothing else would have done. Farmer Tomson was a hard man—so his

neighbours said. Not that he lacked uprightness and honesty, for he was famed over the whole country for these very qualities, as well as for his simple, earnest piety. But people said he was "near," "close-fisted," "mean," that he would "skin a flea for its hide." By which they meant that he was grasping in money matters, and would never part with a penny if he could help it. One other failing Farmer Tomson had. He was subject to sudden outbursts of violent anger.

Hal was heartily tired of the long, dusty road and the jolting waggon, when, after but a single hour's rest at mid-day, about six o'clock the farmer drew up at a farm-house gate, which was speedily opened by a small boy with a snub nose, and, so far as could be seen from the dirt upon it, a much-freckled face.

"Wal, Tom," cried the farmer, "supper ready?"

"Bin ready this hour back, it has," quoth the small boy. "Mother sez you're to hurry or the corn-cakes 'll get cold." Saying which he climbed up behind and stared open-mouthed at the stranger until the door of the farm-house was reached.

A ruddy-cheeked, goodnatured-looking woman, some years younger than the farmer, bustled out to greet them.

"You at last, is it, father?" she cried. "I did think you was never a-goin' to git back, an' me without a pinch o' tea in the house. So that's the new boy,

is it? He's bigger'n t'other un. What's your name, sonny?"

"Hal, ma'am"—with a tug at his cap.

"An' was you sea-sick? Are you tired? Hungry too, I s'pose? T'other un was when he kem. Land sakes, y'orter seen him eat! He's allus hungry, little Tom is. But there, jest hear how I'm a-runnin' on, an' you folks wantin' yer teas!" cried the good woman, bustling into the house, tea-packet in hand.

The horses put up, the farmer bade the boys wash and come to supper. Tom led the way to the pump.

"Are you the boy he calls 't'other un?'" asked Hal, when he had washed and taken his turn at the handle that his companion might do the same.

"Yes, s'pose I'm t'other un, now you've come. But my name's Tom," replied the small boy.

"How long have you been here?"

"Nigh on a year."

"Like the place?"

"Yes; on'y they works me hard, they des."

"And the folks—are they kind to you?"

"They're a' right, 'cept when the old un gits mad he whollops me, he des. But, say, are you a 'Nardo boy?"

"Yes; are you?"

"No, I ain't. My father kem out here an' died, an' my mother couldn't keep me, she couldn't, an' so I kem here to arn my keep."

Although many of the articles of food on the supper-table were quite new to Hal, he ate heartily, much to Mother Tomson's satisfaction. But the more he ate, the more she heaped upon his plate, till at last he leaned back in his chair in despair.

"Eat it up, sonny," said she kindly.

"I've had enough, thank'e, ma'am," said Hal.

"Father," remarked Mother Tomson to the farmer, "the boy sez he can't eat no more."

"Wal, mother, I guess we'll strain a pint this time an' let him off," the farmer replied; while Hal stared from one to the other in surprise.

"Tom," said the farmer to the other boy, "swaller what's in your mouth; Hal, you listen. Now, Tom, speak up; what's the fust pint of good manners at this 'ere table?"

"Eat all you wants," replied Tom, swallowing a big mouthful of corn-bread with so much haste that his eyes bulged out ominously.

"An' what's the second pint?" continued the farmer.

"Scrape yer plate clean," responded Tom.

"Anythin' more?"

"An' don't leave no scraps," added Tom, endeavouring as he spoke to hide a quantity of broken food beneath his plate.

"Right!" said the farmer with a nod of approval. "Now, Hal, them's the rules of perliteness at this 'ere table, an' you'll be expected to obsarve 'em. Ample

sufficiency to eat, an' nothin' to leave—that's the talk. Tom, you or'nary good-for-nothin', what you leavin' that corn-cake for? Eat it up, sir; eat it up!"

"Please, sir, I've eat a ample sufficiency, I have," pleaded Tom, echoing the farmer's words as he fingered the last chunk of his liberal supper allowance.

"Eat it up, sir!" cried the farmer wrathfully. "I ain't a-goin' to 'low no sech waste of good vittals in my house. D'ye hear, sir; eat it up!"

Tom, with difficulty and evident repugnance, crammed the bread into his mouth, an operation which again seemed to endanger the safety of his eyes.

"That's right," said the farmer approvingly as he rose from the table. "If you *air* good for nothin' else, you can eat, 'tany rate."

As soon as it was dark Hal and Tom were sent off to bed. They were allowed no light; but as well as Hal could make out, their chamber was a garret over the kitchen, with but one window. The sloping roof came down to within a few feet of the bare floor, and in the recess thus formed stood the bed, of which the linen was coarse, but clean.

No sooner were the boys alone than Tom began to disgorge his pockets of sundry fragments of corn-cake, buttered biscuits, and brown bread.

"Hello! what's that for?" asked Hal.

"'Cause I don't want'er git licked, I don't," replied Tom laconically.

"But you'll be beaten if you steal things, won't you?"

"Who's stealin' things?" cried Tom, bridling up. "I ain't."

"Then how did you get 'em?" demanded Hal.

"Forgot them rules of perliteness a'ready, hev you?" asked Tom loftily. "What you gits you eats. If you leaves it you gits licked. Sometimes I'm hungry an' sometimes I ain't. What I doesn't eat I brings away in my pockets."

"Are the old folks as partic'lar as all that?" exclaimed Hal.

"Dinner's the wust," continued Tom, not heeding the question. "A feller can't stow meat an' taties inter his pockets like he can inter his insides, an' so he's got to swaller it all down. Ugh! jest you wait! Sea sick ain't nothin' to it."

Just then the door leading to the garret stairs opened and the farmer called out, "You git into bed an' stop that jaw, or I'll fetch the tickler up thar!"

"What's the tickler?" asked Hal in a whisper as he crept into bed.

"It's the strap what he lathers a feller with," replied Tom, shivering as though at the recollection of something painful.

CHAPTER II.

HAL MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE "TICKLER."

AFTER an early breakfast next morning Hal accompanied the farmer and Tom to the "back field," a large inclosure of cultivated land in the rear of the great barn, terminating on one side in the steep bank of a mill-pond. Here the farmer, after setting them to dig a patch of early potatoes, left them. Though wholly unaccustomed to the work, Hal, by dint of watching little Tom, managed pretty well.

They had not been long at work when a stone, thrown by some unseen hand, struck Tom's fork.

"What's that?" asked Hal, looking up quickly.

"Somebody threwed a stone, I guess," replied Tom.

They ceased plying their forks and looked about. But nobody was to be seen, and, unwilling to incur their master's displeasure by leaving the spot in search of the thrower of the missile, they set to work again.

Presently another stone, hurled with surer aim, whizzed through the air and struck Tom on the leg. He uttered a cry of pain and dropped his fork. In a

moment Hal was at his side, endeavouring to ascertain the extent of the injury, when a harsh, mocking laugh caused them both to look up.

"It's that bully, Ned Croft, so it is!" cried Tom, pointing to the fence, from behind which an overgrown lad of sixteen or thereabouts was watching their movements, and chuckling over the effect of his shot. Seeing that he was discovered, Ned climbed upon the fence and assumed a defiant attitude.

"Hello, guttersnipes!" he shouted, "d'ye want to fight? 'Cause, if you do, come on an' I'll drub the pair of you."

Hal and Tom set to work again without deigning to notice this challenge, for the digging must be finished before night, and they had neither time nor strength to waste on fighting.

"Who is he?" asked Hal.

"The biggest bully in the settlement, he is," replied little Tom. "He picks on every boy in the place, an' nobody dar's fight him. Licked me t'other day, so he did."

"Licked you! Why?" asked Hal.

"Oh! he was a-ketchin' trout in the pond an' los' his rod. Arkst me to go inter the water arter it, an' I give him sass an' wouldn't. So he beat me, he did."

"Hi, slavies!" bawled Croft from the fence; "say, won't you 'blige me by comin' here an' lettin' me

punch your heads?" and with that he threw another stone, which struck Hal on the back.

With an angry flush Hal dropped his fork and shook his fist at their tormenter.

"Wait till I get a chance," he cried. "Big as you are, I'll give you a drubbing you won't forget in a hurry. You're a mean sneak, that's what you are, to beat a little fellow like Tom here."

Croft leapt down from the fence. "Come on, both of you!" he shouted, cracking his fists. "I ain't afraid."

"Come here to-night after supper, if you want to fight," replied Hal. "You're a coward, that's what you are. Say, will you come and fight me to-night?"

"No, I won't; but I'll fight you now," cried Croft, still keeping a safe distance. "You dar'n't come on, that's what's the matter." And he threw another stone.

"Tom," said Hal, "gather some stones, quick. We'll show him we're not afraid of him, the coward!"

Seeing the two boys collecting stones Croft took to his heels, followed by a well-directed volley of missiles, some of which took effect and made him howl melodiously.

On the safe side of the fence he renewed his taunts and banter.

"You come here to-night if it's fighting you want,"

Hal called out as he resumed his work; and Croft, perceiving his cowardly sport to be at an end for that day, sneaked away with many threats of vengeance upon the "slaviea."

Late in the afternoon, while the boys were still engaged on the long potato rows, they caught sight of Ned Croft seated on a stump by the pond, fishing.

"The work's nearly done," said Hal; "let's rest a bit and settle with the bully yonder."

"He'll run if he sees two on us," said Tom; "you hide in them bushes an' le' me go on ahead. He'll tackle me 't wonst, so he will. He allus des. Then you come up an' pepper 'im."

To this Hal readily agreed, and secreted himself in the low bushes which bordered the pond. Tom walked towards Croft, whistling softly and pretending not to see him.

No sooner did Croft catch sight of the lad than he threw his rod into the water beyond reach and called out: "Hi, there, you, Tom! come here and get my rod for me."

"Git it yourself an' see how you like it," replied Tom coolly.

"What's that you're saying?" demanded Croft, making a dash at Tom; "after it, I tell you, or I'll chuck you in."

Tom, being the nimbler of the two, eluded the

bully, giving Croft a stinging blow in the face as he did so, which made him roar with pain.

"Wait till I catch you," he spluttered; "I'll hammer you first and duck you afterwards."

"Pr'aps you'd bes' ketch me first," sneered Tom, still evading his pursuer, and gradually drawing him towards the spot where Hal lay concealed.

As Croft ran up, Hal emerged from the bushes. Croft at once stopped and looked about for some place of safety, for, bully that he was, he never willingly fought unless the smaller size of his opponent assured him of victory. Hal was fully two years Croft's junior; but there was something in the thick-set figure of the English boy which warned the latter that it would be unsafe to risk an encounter with him.

Hal stripped off his jacket as he faced Croft. "You've been spoiling for a licking all day," said he, "and now you're going to get one."

"I don't want to fight," whined the bully. "I only want my rod. He's got my rod."

"Shut up!" cried Hal, squaring up to him. "He hasn't got your rod, and you know it. You threw the rod into the pond yourself, and said you'd throw him in after it, you cowardly sneak! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a big chap like you, to pick on a little fellow like Tom. Take a lad nearer your own size if you want to fight."

Croft began to wish himself well out of the scrape.

"There's two of you. Two on one ain't fair," he whimpered.

"No, there's not," said Hal, edging nearer. "I'm goin' to lick you myself, though I'm not nigh your size. Tom'll stand by and see fair play. Mind your eye!"

"I don't want to hurt a little fellow like you," replied Croft, drawing back hastily.

Hal laughed. "Little or big, I'm not afraid of you. You dared me to fight this morning, and now I'm ready. Besides, you've picked on little Tom here long enough, and I ain't going to allow it."

Seeing there was no way out of it but to fight, Croft resorted to stratagem. In him, as in all bullies, treachery and brute strength took the place of courage. If he could only put Hal off his guard, he thought, he might go in and win easily.

"I say," he suddenly exclaimed, "there's the old man coming down the hill!"

Hal incautiously glanced over his shoulder, and Croft, having secured the coveted advantage, aimed a swift blow at his left ear.

But Hal was too quick for him. Springing lightly aside, before Croft had time to recover himself Hal delivered a well-directed *one—two* straight from the shoulder, which stretched the bully upon the broad of his back, and caused little Tom to dance with delight.

"Had enough?" demanded Hal, "or would you like

another on that pretty nose of yours? If you do, just get up and I'll kindly oblige you."

"Let me alone," whined Croft. "I never did you no harm."

"Have you had enough?" demanded Hal again.

"Yes," whimpered the bully.

"And you promise never to beat little Tom again?"

"Yes, if you'll let me up."

"I've half a mind to throw you into the pond, you coward, as you threatened you would Tom," said Hal. "But I'll let you off this time. And mind, if ever you lay hands on Tom again, it'll be the worse for you. Get up."

Croft rose slowly to his feet, and, seeing that Hal had no intention of renewing the attack, darted up the bank, shouting defiantly as he ran: "Slavies! who's afraid of you? I'll be even with you yet, see if I don't."

Hal was about to follow him, when a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"What tarnation game's this yer playin', hey?" demanded Farmer Tomson. "Es this the way you digs my pertaties? Wal, what hev you got to say for yourself?"

"He tried to beat little Tom, and I pitched into him," Hal protested stoutly.

Now it happened that Croft's mother was sister to Farmer Tomson, though, of course, Hal did not know

it. The two farms adjoined, and Croft's father was one of the most well-to-do farmers in the county. At sight of his uncle, Croft plucked up courage and came half-way down the bank.

"It's a lie, what he sez, Uncle Abe," he cried. "I was sitting on the bank fishing, when them two comes up and throws my rod into the pond. Then they goes at me and beats me. Just see my nose, if you don't believe me!" and the bully whimpered loudly as he tenderly laid a finger on the swollen and disfigured organ.

At sight of the injury his nephew had sustained the farmer grew red with anger. "Wal, if this ain't a purty way to arn your keep!" he cried, addressing the boys. "I sot you to diggin' them pertaties, an' 'stead o' that you goes trapsin' off like a passel o' rampagin' pirates, and beats my neffy till his pore mar couldn't tell him from Adam. You'll smart for this, you good-fer nothin' scalliwags! Off to the barn with you, till I fetch the tickler."

Hal again attempted to explain, but not a word would the farmer hear. "Off with you!" he cried, "and don' dar' budge from thet barn till I've done with you. I'll larn you to strike my neffy, I reckon!"

There was nothing for it but to obey; so off Hal and Tom trudged to the barn, where the farmer soon made his appearance, "tickler" in hand. It was the first time Hal had set eyes on that persuader of youth.

and its length and thickness did not reassure him. At sight of it Tom began to whimper and beg for mercy, for Tom and the "tickler" were old, though not dear, friends.

Croft took his stand in the open doorway, his face the picture of mean-spirited exultation—a picture which his flattened and discoloured nose did not tend to improve.

"Peel off thet thar jacket of yourn," cried the farmer, addressing Hal, and drawing the "tickler" lovingly through his fingers.

Hal obeyed. "You can strap me if you like," he said in final protest, as he threw his coat over a harrow; "for you're bigger 'n I am. But give me Tom's share too—he didn't touch him."

"Ned," said the farmer, turning to his nephew, "I'm a jest man. When you hev got satisfaction for thet damaged nose of yourn, why, sing out, an' I'll quit."

"Pay on, Uncle Abe!" cried Croft, dancing with glee. "Pay on—I'll say when."

The farmer seized Hal by the arm and "paid on" with no light hand. Hal set his teeth hard and uttered never a word; while Croft chuckled over his enemy's discomfiture, and relieved his feelings in gibes which hurt Hal far more than the strap. At last the farmer, hot and panting with his exertions, suspended operations. "Did you say stop?" he asked Croft.

"No, Uncle Abe, no!" cried the bully, whose

hatred of Hal was not yet satisfied; "just tetch him up a little more behind, do!"

But the farmer's wrath had spent itself, and he began to feel somewhat ashamed of the part he had played. Hal saw this, and, although suffering acutely from the blows of the strap, again interposed in little Tom's behalf.

"Don't beat Tom, sir," he pleaded. "He's such a little un; and he didn't hit 'im, neither."

"Yes, he did, Uncle Aba, yes, he did!" screamed Croft, loth to be baulked of a single whit of his cowardly revenge; "he hit me with his fist."

"Wal, I ain't a-goin' to tickle him this jant, anyhow," replied the farmer, as he rolled up the strap. "Guess you two won't want no supper to-night, so you'd bes' be off to bed."

Without waiting for any second bidding, Hal and Tom stole away to their garret chamber.

"Why didn't you let 'im tickle me, too?" Tom asked reproachfully.

"Because," replied Hal, as he stretched his aching limbs on the bed, "you're such a little un."

When it grew dark they heard a soft footstep on the stairs. It was good Mother Tomson with some supper for them.

"I know you didn't deserve the strap a bit," she explained apologetically; "it was all that Ned Croft's doin'; an' father, he's so excitable like!"

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE TOM PROVES HIMSELF GOOD FOR SOMETHING.

THE house of Farmer Tomson stood in a green valley, and through the valley ran a tidal river which emptied its muddy waters into the westernmost arm of the famous Bay of Fundy. The river could not be seen from the lower windows of the farm-house, for a hill thrust itself between and cut off the view. In the old days, before British men-o'-war sailed up the bay and bore away the hapless French settlers in a body from their peaceful homes, a chapel had crowned this hill. Here the French Acadians for many miles around were wont to gather of a Sunday on foot and horseback to hear mass. And so the place came to be called Masstown; which name it still bore when Hal Hungerford first set foot in it, although the thrifty French and their neat chapel had disappeared more than a century before. Not that Masstown was really a town—the total number of houses in it did not exceed a hundred, and the inhabitants themselves spoke of it familiarly as “the settlement.”

One day, about a week after Hal's arrival, there ran

through the village of Masstown a ripple of excitement such as it had not known for many years.

Gossip said that a mammoth circus was about to visit the settlement.

The rumour spread like wild-fire, and soon afterwards, in a dashing yellow waggon, came the bill-posters, who proceeded to cover every available yard of board-fence and shop-front with enormous "pieters" in gaudy colours, illustrative of the surpassing attractions of the coming "show."

Besides the wonders of the tight-rope and trapeze, the skilled riders and tumblers, the fat lady and the skeleton man, there was a "'nagerie" of wild animals such as no villager had ever dreamed could exist outside of Noah's ark.

All this, and much more, did the posters set forth in flaming colours and jaw-cracking words. And the simple, gaping villagers stared in wonderment, and believed it all as implicitly as they believed what the minister preached from the pulpit of their little meeting-house on Sunday.

Hal and Tom, in the course of sundry errands to the village "store," made themselves thoroughly acquainted with the pictorial glories of the coming "show." So, too, did Farmer Tomson, only with different feelings. In his opinion the advent of such a circus meant a serious moral danger to the young people of the village, and he earnestly "sot his face agin" the evil.

"Them thar akerbats," he remarked one day at dinner, raising his horny fore-finger to hold the attention of the boys and add force to his words; "them thar akerbats an' ballad gals an' sech like, is all on 'em works of inikitie, in *my* jedgment. Scriptor's agin 'em tooth an' toe-nail, thet's sartin. Thar ain't no man as has any call to go an' drag a passel o' feerocious beasteses 'bout the kentry a-bamboozlin' folks outer their hard arnin's, an' turnin' the hul settlement inter a buzzin' bumble-bee's nest. I've lift up my v'ice an' exhorted *in* pray'r-meetin' an' *outer* pray'r-meetin', an' so hev the passon; but you may jes' as wal pour water on a duck's back for all the good it des. The neighbours air clean gone mad 'bout this 'ere show bisness, an' thar'll be a jedgment sent on 'em 'cause of it, sure es eggs is eggs!"

Meanwhile the excitement was fanned by the approach of another event, long looked for and eagerly anticipated. This was nothing less than the launch of a ship which for two years had been building on the river bank beyond Farmer Tomson's hill. To-day the tide would reach high-water mark at twelve o'clock, and then the ship was to be launched. In the afternoon the circus caravan was due. Drawn by this double attraction, the event of a lifetime in so quiet a village, the people flocked in hundreds from all the settlements for fifty miles around.

Mother Tomson's youngest daughter, who had

married and "settled" some ten miles away, drove in that morning to see the launch, bringing her two children, little Sarah Jane and the baby. But warm-hearted grandmamma Tomson would not hear of baby being carried to the shipyard in the hot sun, insisting that it should be left with her while little Sarah Jane and her mother viewed the launch.

To assist in taking care of the little charge, Tom was called; for Mother Tomson was elbow-deep in the mysteries of butter-making. Farmer Tomson, being financially interested in the new ship, had gone off to the "yard" after finishing the churning, taking Hal with him.

"Tom, you mind baby while I run across to the Pattison's," said Mother Tomson as she dried her fat hands on her striped jean apron, and rolled down the sleeves of her dress, which had been tucked high above her elbows.

"Yes'm," replied Tom, jogging the rocker of the green cradle with his bare foot. But as Mother Tomson passed through the kitchen door, and down the lane where the birds sang cheerily in the September sunshine, and the golden-rods nodded their yellow heads at each other as if in anticipation of the day's sport, Tom's eyes followed her wistfully.

Launch-day, and Tom kept indoors to rock that pesky cradle! "It's too bad, it is," he muttered discontentedly; "babies ain't no good nohow, they ain't."

Impatient Tom! He quite forgot that once, not so very long ago either, he had been a baby, too. But then, Tom was not a philosopher—only a play-loving, work-hating, barefoot little nine-year-old who gladly enough took life as he found it—so long as he found it full of fun and escaped the “tickler.”

Tom jogged the cradle, and whistled softly to himself as he looked out of doors and thought of the injustice of it all. He didn't see why the world should be so hard on a little shaver like him, he didn't. He worked as hard as he could, and did as he was told; and yet Mother Tomson called him “little good-for-nothing,” and kept him at home on launch-day to rock that cradle; while Hal—well, never mind Hal. Tom wouldn't grudge *him* a sight of the launch, seeing as how he got the “tickler” the other day, he did.

“Guess it's asleep,” said he as he slowed the motion of the cradle. Tom didn't like babies. Few boys do, strange as it may seem. But his look was far from unkindly as he pulled back a corner of the covering and glanced at his tiny pink-fisted charge.

Presently a curious noise rang out on the still mid-day air—a rapid fusilade of ringing blows that made the boy's heart leap and his pulses tingle. Dozens of hammers seemed to vie with each other as to which could strike the fastest and sharpest. The sounds came from the shipyard beyond the hill. Tom fidgeted uneasily on his stool, and glanced again at

the sleeping baby. Then he puckered up his mouth and gave vent to a shrill whistle of dismay.

"They're a-knockin' out the wedges," he groaned, "an' Mother Tomson ain't back yet. I'll miss the fun, I will."

Softly removing his foot from the rocker, Tom ran to the door and scanned the lane with eager eyes for some sign of Mother Tomson's return. But no Mother Tomson was in sight. Instead, he saw Ned Croft in the act of scaling the lane fence on his way to the "yard."

"I say, youngster," shouted Croft, "ain't you coming to see the launch?"

"Can't," replied Tom gloomily.

"You're afraid of the 'tickler,' you are," sneered Croft; "but look sharp or you'll miss the fun. Don't you hear the hammers? They're a-knockin' out the wedges!" and with that he jumped from the fence and ran towards the shipyard.

Tom was in a dreadful state of mind. There was nothing in the whole world he dreaded so much as the "tickler," and to desert his post would be as good as inviting the farmer to use it on his back. But there, over the brow of the hill, rose the ship's topmasts adorned with gay streamers. He could distinctly hear the glad hum of the merry holiday-makers. This was too much for Tom's resolution. The lively play of the hammers seemed to get into his feet, and in a moment the "tickler" was forgotten.

"I'll jest run to the top of the hill an' hev a look," he said to himself. And with that off he scampered.

Now, as Tom's ill-luck would have it, a flock of geese, which were feeding about the farmyard, took it into their heads, as these inquisitive birds sometimes did, to pay Mother Tomson a visit; and, seeing no one about, deliberately made their way into the kitchen, led by a conceited old gander. Here they began to discuss their surroundings, and especially the strange object in the green cradle—which had never, to the best of their recollection, been put to such a use before—with excited gabbling. This woke the baby, who, alarmed by the unusual noise, cried lustily, and in turn alarmed the geese, who gabbled louder than ever. At this juncture Mother Tomson returned.

"Land alive!" she exclaimed as she drew near the kitchen door; "whatever is that good-for-nothin' of a Tom doin' to the darlin' baby?"

She was soon made acquainted with the true state of affairs. The geese, hearing her approach, and having a vivid remembrance of sundry heavy thumpings with a broomstick, made for the door in a body, gabbling their loudest and scaring Mother Tomson half out of her wits as they flew past. Into the kitchen she darted and snatched the screaming baby from the cradle, alternately soothing its terror and uttering dire threats against the delinquent Tom.

"There, there! was it frightened then? Drat that

boy! I might 'a' knowed. There, there! granny's come back. The little good-for-nothin'! jest wait until I get my hands on him, though."

And, her wrath waxing hotter and hotter against Tom, Mother Tomson strode to the door in the hope of catching sight—and hold—of the youthful culprit. Sure enough, there he was, perched on the hill fence, with his back to the house, eagerly watching the preparations for the launch. Mother Tomson's voice rose to the occasion like a steam-whistle.

"Tom, come here this very minute, you onmin'ful good-for-nothin'!"

At this unexpected summons Tom almost tumbled off the fence. He was fairly caught, and there was nothing for it but to obey; so down he got and crept back to the farmhouse. Mother Tomson was waiting for him. Good woman though she was, her anger got the better of her for once.

"Didn't I tell ye to mind the baby?" she screamed, rolling up her sleeves as she advanced upon the cowering boy; "didn't I, hey? And 's this the way ye do it, trapsin' off soon's my back's turned an' leavin' them brutes of geese to gobble up the little innercent? I'll larn ye to mind what I sez to ye. Take that, you onmin'ful good-for-nothin'!"—the "that" being a stunning slap on Tom's ear which sent him sprawling on the floor. "Take that, an' don't le' me see your face agin to-day."

Tom picked himself up, and without delay took advantage of the leave so summarily given. In a few minutes his scudding heels had disappeared over the hill in the direction of the shipyard.

Here a gay and festive scene met his eager though somewhat watery gaze. The hillside, the heaps of unused timber scattered about, the old saw-mill, all possible points of vantage, were occupied by groups of gaily-attired spectators. From the "ways" rose the stately ship, gorgeous in fluttering streamers, waiting the moment of her release as a white-winged bird of the sea. Preparations for the launch were going forward apace, and everybody was on the tiptoe of expectation.

Being a small boy, Tom easily made his way to the front, where only a dozen yards of white chips separated the line of spectators from the giant barque. He had forgotten all about his smarting ear by this.

The noise of the hammers ceased. All the "shores" had been knocked away save two near the bows. The ship lay ready in her mighty "cradle" of iron-bound timbers—a cradle much more to Tom's liking than that he had left behind at the house.

"She'll be off in a minute!" ran in a whisper from mouth to mouth. A great hush fell upon the crowd.

Then from near the stern there came a sharp, ringing blow, followed by others and hundreds of others, all up the length of the long keel, in rapid rhythm.

Fast and furious fell the great mallets as the men beneath the ways knocked out the last great wedges, in order that the ship might glide freely into the sea.

Faster and faster fell the blows. Still and stiller grew the breathless crowd. Tom's heart fairly leaped with excitement. He had his cap in hand ready to throw into the air, and his mouth wide open ready to cheer, the moment the ship moved.

"There, she's off!"

"No, she isn't!"

"I tell you I saw her move!"

"Yes, there she— Hip, hip!—"

Suddenly the excited cheering subsided into a cry of dismay. Directly beneath the black hull of the slowly-moving ship, toddling unconcernedly over the white chips, was a little child!

"Sarie Jane! Oh, my child'll be killed!" shrieked a woman, struggling to break away from the bystanders who held her back. The woman was Mother Tomson's daughter, and the child beneath the "ways" was her little Sarah Jane.

Faster and faster moved the ship. The "ways" groaned and creaked beneath the weight. The child, surprised, looked up at the moving mass above her. An instant and she would be crushed to death. The onlookers seemed paralysed. Not a man moved.

But a boy did. As quick as a flash a bare-head,

bare-foot little fellow sprang across the narrow space between the crowd and the ship, snatched up the child in his arms, and bore her safely back.

Not a second too soon. Hardly had the child left the spot when the heavy "shore" which had supported the ship's bow fell with a resounding crash in her very tracks.

A deep, tremulous murmur ran through the great concourse of people as the overjoyed mother strained little Sarah Jane to her bosom. There was not a dry eye in the whole crowd.

"I say, mates, three cheers for the lad!" cried a burly shipwright.

"Hip, hip, hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

When Mother Tomson heard the story from her daughter's lips half an hour later, she wiped her eyes with her striped apron and exclaimed, "An' who'd 'a' thought it of our Tom, the little good-for-nothin'!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HAL AT THE CIRCUS.

THE circus had come at last. Hal and Tom stood by the gate and watched it move slowly past. First came an enormous waggon, blazing with gilt, and drawn by six white horses. This was the band-waggon, in which rode the gold-laced circus musicians blowing their flashing instruments, while the big drum boomed and the six horses pranced in step to the music.

"Ain't it a stunner!" cried Tom gleefully, pointing to the great drum; "feel like I could dance, I des."

"I kalkilate you'll dance ter a diff'r'nt chune if you stan' gawkin' through them palin's any longer. Off with you, you two, to the back paster, an' yank them thar cows along home here in less'n no time." Thus rudely did Farmer Tomson dispel Tom's delight in the passing procession.

A lingering look at the long line of mysterious vehicles which followed the band-waggon, and they hurried off to the pasture in search of the cows; while Farmer Tomson, with many gestures and ejacu-

lations of disapproval, stood and watched the circus go slowly by.

After supper Hal screwed up his courage to make a request. "Mister Tomson, please may 'Tom and me go to the show to-morrow?"

The farmer's astonishment was so great as to render him speechless for some seconds. "Wal," he said at length in very decided tones, "I reckon you can't."

"Only for a little while," Hal pleaded; "we'll get up bright and early so's to do our work."

"Tain't the work, lad," said the farmer more kindly; "it's the circus I've sot my face agin, with its ongodly dance chunes and its hifalutin' tomfoolery. No, you can't go."

"Oh, father," Mother Tomson interposed, "the lads 'll git no harm. They're young an' cur'us like, an' wants ter see, well es the rest o' folks."

"Mother," replied the farmer reprovingly, "I'm s'prised at you! Do you wanter pison the min's o' the risin' gineration? Es elder of the Methodis connection, it's my bounden dooty to uphold the passon. The passon sez no, an' I sez no."

"But, father, Tom's bin a good, dootiful lad to-day, so he has. On'y for him little Sarie Jane ed bin killed!" Mother Tomson wiped a tear from the corner of one eye as she fired this shot. "An' there's Hal was beat yisterday all for nothin'. You owe it to let 'em go, you *do*, father."

Farmer Tomson said nothing, but as he left the house he looked thoughtful.

"Never you mind, boys," said Mother Tomson, "I'll fetch 'im round yet, an' you shell go to that show. I've sot my mind on't."

At breakfast next morning nothing was said about the circus, but the farmer announced his intention of driving to a distant town to arrange for the purchase of a mowing-machine. The boys saw with delight that the work he laid out for them for the day was much less formidable than usual; and by a series of determined spurts they had completed it when the horn sounded for dinner.

"It's all right, boys," observed Mother Tomson with a smile as they entered the kitchen. "Father couldn't never hold out agin *me*. You're a-goin'."

Neither Hal nor Tom could eat much dinner. When they rose from the table Mother Tomson said: "Be back by sundown to fetch the cows an' he'p with the milkin', an' be good boys and don't get into no scrapes. Here's two shillin' for you to spend."

So unexpected was this kindness that the boys could scarcely find words with which to thank her.

"My eye!" cried Tom, cutting a caper as they ran down the lane; "two shillin' to spend! I never hed sech a lot afore."

In a broad meadow just below the village were pitched the circus tents, gay with flags. The band

played lively tunes, the showmen shouted, the vast crowd of sight-seers laughed, and talked, and cheered as they moved from tent to tent, or made merry at the counters of the refreshment booths.

"Walk right up, ladies an' gentlemen!" cried a showman at the entrance to a large tent. "Walk right up an' see the live lion—"

"Stuffed with straw!" shouted a voice close behind Hal and Tom.

"What's that you're sayin', youngster?" the showman demanded of Hal. "You'd best keep a civil tongue in your head. Walk up, ladies and gentlemen! *only* sixpence a head."

"We didn't say nothin', so we didn't," retorted Tom.

"I heard you," cried the showman angrily. "Get out of this, or it'll be the worse for you."

As they turned away they met Ned Croft face to face. "He, he!" snickered the bully with an assumption of easy familiarity; "that's three times I've fooled him this morning. Wasn't he mad, though! I say, young fellers, where you going?"

"What's that to you?" demanded Hal, who still retained a vivid recollection of the barn incident.

"Oh, nothing; on'y thought p'r'aps you might like a treat. Y'ain't got no money, I s'pose?" said Croft, jingling some loose coin in his trousers pockets.

In reply Hal produced the two shilling pieces, and exhibited them with some pride.

"Two bob!" cried Croft, assuming a more friendly tone than ever. "How you going to spend 'em?"

"We're a-goin' to see the show, we are," replied Tom.

"Come along an' have a go at the good things first. I'll stand treat, you know," said Croft, taking Hal by the arm and leading him towards one of the refreshment booths.

Quite deceived by Croft's manner, the boys readily agreed to this proposal, and soon the three stood before the counter.

"Now," cried Croft, "what you have to eat? Don't be bashful. I pays, you know. Try that," and he placed a huge slice of plum-cake in Tom's hand.

Thus urged the two boys lunched heartily, Croft himself making a good third.

Suddenly Croft laid the piece of pie he was eating on the counter. "There's my dad," he said hurriedly. "Want to try him for another bob. You wait here; I'll be back in a minute;" and with that he darted from the booth and disappeared in the crowd.

Hal and Tom finished their lunch leisurely, looking for Croft's return at any moment. The keeper of the booth kept a sharp eye upon their movements, and when he saw that they wanted nothing more, came forward and said: "Two shillin's the charge."

Hal stared. "He'll pay," said he, nodding in the direction taken by Croft.

"Who'll pay?" demanded the man.

"Ned Croft," replied Hal.

"I've nothing to do with Ned Croft," said the man in surly tones. "You eat the things, an' you got to pay for them."

"But he'll be back in a minute," urged Hal.

"Not he!" the man made answer; "he's fooling you two. Not the first time to-day he's played his little game here. Two shillin's is the charge. Plank down the cash and make room for them folks behind."

There was so threatening a ring in the man's voice that Hal was fain to obey. With reluctant fingers he laid his two shillings on the counter and sorrowfully turned away. Croft had tricked him shamefully, and his blood boiled at the thought of it.

"Wait till I catch him," he muttered, as he wormed his way through the crowd. But though he kept a sharp look-out for the bully, Croft was nowhere to be seen.

Little Tom was inconsolable. All his visions of the wonders to be witnessed within those canvas walls had vanished in thin air.

"Tain't no use a-lookin' at the outside," he remarked gloomily; "'ton'y makes it worser. Le's go 'way."

After a time they found themselves in the rear of the main tent. Very few people were about, and the boys threw themselves upon the grass close to the canvas wall. They had not lain here long when the

bottom of the canvas was softly lifted and a boy's head popped out. After a cautious survey of the surroundings, the owner of the head made his appearance, and the canvas closed behind him.

"Hello!" cried Tom, recognizing the boy as one of his village acquaintances; "where you come from, Jimmie?"

"Would you like ter know?" asked Jimmie mysteriously. "Well, then, I've bin a-watchin' the hosses inside there," indicating the tent with a jerk of his thumb.

"But you must pay to see the show," said Hal.

"Not if you kin see it without," was Jimmie's significant reply.

Hal and Tom had come here to see the show, and now, through the meanness of sneaking Ned Croft, they must abandon the idea of even so much as a single peep at the wonders concealed by that thin canvas. It was a rank injustice!

"Have you been inside? How did you manage it?" Hal asked eagerly.

"You won't tell?"

"No, we won't tell."

Jimmie glanced swiftly about to make sure their movements were not observed. "Come on, then," said he, "an' I'll show you."

Lifting a corner of the canvas, which had been loosened by the surreptitious removal of a tent-pin,

he crawled through on hands and knees. Hal and Tom, attracted by the beat of horses' hoofs and the shouting within, followed.

As Hal's heels disappeared through the opening, Ned Croft crept from behind a circus waggon which stood near, and ran swiftly round to the front of the great tent. There he addressed a few words to one of the circus men, who returned with him to the rear.

On passing the canvas Hal and Tom found themselves in a dimly-lighted space beneath the tiers of elevated seats with which the tent was lined. Above their heads they could hear the shuffling of innumerable feet, breaking occasionally into thunderous applause of some dexterous performance in the ring below. A rough hoarding of boards alone separated the ring from their place of concealment, and the narrow cracks between these boards afforded a fairly good view of the performance within.

The boy Jimmie, who had introduced them to this private view, threw himself flat upon the ground and applied his eye to the nearest crack. His companions followed his example, and in a moment were so engrossed with what they saw as to forget entirely their position and the danger of discovery.

Suddenly Hal, startled by a cautious footstep, looked up and saw a man standing within a yard of the spot where he lay. Tom and his boy friend, also alarmed by the man's approach, started to their feet and ran

quickly from the tent. Hal was about to follow them when the stranger darted forward and seized him roughly by the arm.

"Let me go!" cried Hal, struggling violently.

But the man only took a tighter grip on his arm, and replied with a laugh, "No, you don't! Keep still, or I'll cuff you. You've been sneakin' round here all day, stealin' what honest folks pays for, and I don't let go my holt till you're safe in the lock-up."

"I've only been in there a minute, and I meant no harm," cried Hal, as the circus man dragged him into the open air.

"None of your jaw!" said the man, giving him a cuff on the side of the head. "You've been in there all the morning, and here's a young gentleman as saw you."

At this, who should step forward but Ned Croft! "Of course he has," asserted the bully. "I saw him crawl through a good two hours ago. He's a bad lot, mister, that's what he is."

"You're a liar!" retorted Hal angrily. "You cheated me out of my two shillings, and now you want to get me into trouble so I sha'n't be able to pay you out for it. But I'll be even with you yet, or—"

"What's the use of denyin' it?" the man who held him by the arm interrupted. "I caught you in the tent, didn't I? So shut up and come along quiet, or I'll make you."

Appeals and resistance were alike useless, and Hal suffered himself to be led away, while Croft, with many taunts, followed close upon his heels.

But Hal was not destined to be locked up that afternoon.

On reaching the front of the great tent, further progress was barred by an angry and excited mob which thronged the entrance. A young farmer was demanding admittance, which the doorkeeper for some reason refused. The farmer's friends crowded about him to see fair play, while the circus men elbowed their way to the front to protect their comrade should violence be attempted. Many on both sides had indulged freely in drink, and every moment added to the excitement.

The farmer repeated his demand and the doorkeeper again refused. High words ensued, a blow was struck, and in an instant the densely packed space before the tent became a scene of the wildest commotion. Circus men and villagers ran to the assistance of their respective parties; women screamed and fled from the spot in terror, or fainted where they stood; the various tents poured forth their inmates in streams; and in less time than it takes to write this the fight became general.

Tent-pins were torn up and used as clubs, stones were hurled in showers, and where other weapons failed fists were used freely.

Hal's captor looked first at the surging mob, then at Hal, and debated whether he should release him or hurry him away to the lock-up.

But Hal settled the matter to his own satisfaction by suddenly wrenching his arm free and making off. The fellow shook his fist after him and then dashed into the crowd, where he speedily found other uses for that weapon of defence.

Perceiving there was no danger of pursuit, Hal soon slackened his pace, and, after a little, approached as near the outskirts of the fight as he dared. For half an hour the combat raged with great fury, at the end of which time it became more desultory. Gradually the combatants broke up into groups of twos and threes, who continued to add considerably to the dismal harvest of black eyes and broken heads already reaped by both parties. Between many of these groups a running fight was sustained, their rapid movements rendering the situation of the spectators one of no small danger.

While Hal was watching the progress of a struggle on his right, half a dozen men bore down upon him suddenly, dealing terrific blows at each other with sticks, stones, and fists. Before Hal was aware of their coming, or could make a movement to avoid them, he was in their midst. Realizing the danger of his position, he stooped quickly and seized a stone which lay at his feet.

At that instant one of the group, a circus man, swung a stick threateningly about his head. Hal drew hastily back and raised the hand which grasped the stone to ward off the blow.

As he did so some one in the crowd hurled a missile which struck the circus man full on the left temple. The poor fellow reeled, threw up his arms, and with a hoarse cry fell heavily to the ground, bleeding profusely. Horror-stricken at the terrible sight, Hal dropped the stone and retreated a few paces.

The by-standers crowded about and examined the fallen man.

"He's hard hit," said one.

"May be a hanging matter this," observed another.

"The life's a'most out of him."

"Who struck him?" asked a third.

To this question there came an unexpected answer. Ned Croft pushed himself forward, and, pointing to the astonished and speechless Hal, cried excitedly, "He's the one. He picked up a big stone and threw it right at him. I saw him do it."

"Ay," interposed a by-stander, "that he did. I saw him with my own eyes."

Croft stooped and peered into the face of the wounded man. "Hello!" he cried, "I see how it is. About half an hour back I was standing behind the big tent, an' a man came out through a

hole in the canvas, leading a boy by the arm. There stands the boy yonder—him as threw the stone; an' this is the man—him as was struck an' knocked down."

Hal slowly approached and looked at the fallen man's face. Croft's words were only too true. This was the very man who had found him concealed in the tent, and from whom he had so recently escaped. Instantly he saw the construction which would be placed upon this circumstance. If the man died, it would be said that he had killed him because he owed him a grudge!

Too sick at heart either to deny the accusation of Croft, or to explain his part in the unhappy affair, Hal turned away and hurried back to the farm.

An hour afterwards the wounded man died, and the whole settlement was thrown into a ferment by the news that Hal Hungerford, Farmer Tomson's new boy, had killed him.

CHAPTER V.

THE FLIGHT ON THE EBB TIDE.

HOUR after hour Hal tossed sleeplessly upon his bed. The accusation of Ned Croft and the words of the by-standers rang ever in his ears—"The life's a'most out of him," "May be a hanging matter this." The man, perhaps, was already dead, and the constables at that very minute on their way to arrest his murderer.

And there was the evidence against him! How had they put it, those people? Discovered in a tent where he had no right to be, cuffed and marched off like a culprit towards the lock-up, he had escaped and watched his chance to settle accounts with the circus man. He was seen to pick up a stone, to raise his hand as if to hurl it, and then the man had fallen at his very feet. These were all facts, and he could deny none of them. What would his assertion of innocence be worth when weighed against such evidence?

Unable longer to endure the suspense of the situation, Hal finally resolved upon telling Farmer Tomson the whole story. Leaving little Tom fast asleep,

he stole down the rough stairs leading to the kitchen, his bare feet falling noiselessly on the hard boards. On reaching the door at the foot of the stairs he paused a moment before lifting the latch.

Standing there, with wildly-beating heart, he heard voices in the kitchen. Farmer Tomson was talking to his wife—talking about *him*. Hal listened. He might have entered the kitchen or gone back to bed, but what he heard would allow him to do neither.

"A mos' oncommon bad bisness, mother," the farmer was saying. "The man's es dead es a door-nail, an' it's in all mouths thet the boy killed him. John Eagan declars he secn the boy raise the stun; an' Ned, he swars his Bible oath he seen him throw it squar' at the feller's head. It's mos' extray-ornary cur'us, for the lad ain't a bad sort, though he *do* eg-knowledge to hev no bringin' up."

Very sorrowful was the voice that replied: "Oh, Abr'am, I don' b'lieve it, I don' b'lieve it! Thar's some mistake somewhar', an' I s'pose the constables'll be here first thing in the mornin' to 'rest 'im. Oh, the pore lad! the pore lad!" and Mother Tomson wept aloud.

Hal waited to hear no more. The man dead! People saying *he* had killed him! The constable coming in the morning!—Innocent though he was, had he not foreseen it all? His heart swelled till he thought it would burst. and his feet dragged like great clogs

of lead as he slowly climbed the stairs to the garret.

What should he do? Remain here and allow himself to be thrown into prison, perhaps hanged, and he innocent? No; he would never do that. What then?

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he leaned his throbbing, troubled head on his hands and thought long and hard. At last he started up, went to the window, and looked out. The moon was at the full, and all out-of-doors was bathed in silvery light. He softly opened the window and leaned over the casement. The roof of a wash-house joined the wall just below, sloping away to within a little over a yard of the ground.

"I'll do it," he said resolutely and half aloud. "I never touched the man, and I sha'n't stop here to be hung."

He went to the bed and shook little Tom, who stirred, grumbled at being disturbed, then sat up and sleepily asked what was the matter.

"Speak low or they'll hear you," said Hal. "I want to ask you something, little Tom."

Tom rubbed his eyes to get the sleep out of them. "A' right," he whispered; "I'm awake now, I am. What you want'er arks me?"

"Tom," Hal said huskily, "would you be sorry if I went away?"

"An' leave me?" inquired Tom in alarm.

"Yes, and leave you."

"But I'll go 'long with you, I will," said Tom in a tone of assurance. "You're the on'y chap wot's ever stuck up for me, you are. You licked Ned Croft, an' got the tickler, an' all for me; an' I'll stan' by you, I will."

"Well, Tom, I'm going."

"When? To-morrer?" asked Tom.

"No; now."

"A' right; I'll come too," said Tom, proceeding to dress as cheerfully as though midnight flittings were common occurrences with him.

"Did yer tell Mother Tomson?" he asked, pausing suddenly in the act of putting on his shoes.

"No, Tom, I haven't told no one. They mustn't know."

"An' sha'n't we say good-bye?"

"No," replied Hal with tears in his eyes.

"She'll be mighty sorry, I reckon," said Tom; adding, after a pause, "an' I'm sorry too, I am. Which way're ye goin'?"

"Over the wash-house roof, Tom."

"Oh!" said Tom, opening his eyes very wide.

Hal quickly got his own and Tom's few belongings together and proceeded to pack them into his box.

"Have you anything that will do to eat on the way?" asked Hal before closing the lid.

"'Course I hev," replied Tom cheerfully; and thrusting his hand under the pillow, he drew forth sundry remains of his last meal.

Hal stowed the fragments of food in the box, remarking that they might need them, and tied it with the rope. Then he took a bit of paper and the stump of a pencil, and sitting down at the rude wooden stand which stood by the window, wrote a farewell message to the farmer and his wife. Hal was not a ready writer, and in the uncertain light it took him a long time to finish his task to his satisfaction. When it was ready he laid the missive in a conspicuous position upon the stand.

It was now near midnight, and all was quiet in the house. Hal lifted the box to the sill of the open window.

"I'll go first," he said to Tom. "When I'm safe on the ground hand me the box. Then I'll help you down."

Tom nodding assent, Hal clambered out upon the low roof of the wash-house. They were soon safe on the ground, Hal shouldered the box, and noiselessly they stole away.

When they reached the road Tom turned to take a last look at the house. "They've bin good to me, they hev, spite o' the tickler," he said with a sob. "Good-bye, Mother Tomson! I ain't no good-for-nothin' I ain't, an' you won't miss me, I reckon."

Though his eyes filled with tears Hal said nothing, but led the way towards the shipyard. The tide was near its flood, and the soft moonlight lay bright on massive timbers, white chips, and unruffled water. The place was deserted and silent, save for the faint lapping of the tide as it crept inch by inch up the bank. Several boats lay here, now almost afloat and gently rocking to the motion of the tide. Hal selected the smallest of these, partly because of its lighter weight, partly because a pair of old oars were lying across the thwarts.

"Get in, little Tom," he said as he laid the box on the bottom of the boat.

Tom obeyed as though the proceeding were the most natural one in the world; and Hal, first throwing on board a small kedge by which the boat had been moored, shoved off and sprang lightly in. Hal knew something about a boat, and little Tom knew more. Between them they got out the oars and pulled silently down the river.

Hal's nature was of finer fibre than that of many boys who, like him, are sent to the Colonies to make their own way in the world. A railway accident had robbed him of his father, a country doctor, at the early age of seven years. Then a bank failure left his mother penniless and without friends. She went to London in the hope of earning a livelihood by her needle, but sorrow and privation so preyed upon her

gentle spirit that she died ere Hal had reached his tenth year. Thus thrown upon the world, the lad had subsisted as best he could in the London streets until rescued by benevolent hands and placed in Dr. Barnardo's famous East-end Home.

Fortunately his acquaintance with the vice and misery of the streets had been too short to efface the precious memory of his mother; a memory which grew dearer to him as he grew older, and never ceased to influence his life for good. Her example, no less than her precepts and her prayers, had raised him above the ordinary level of the class to which misfortune had consigned him; and now his spirits rose as each stroke of the oars carried him further and further from unmerited disgrace and shame.

Once a man hailed them from the bank; but they pulled all the harder and were soon far out of sight.

And now the tide turned and began to run swiftly out. So rapidly did the boat glide past the ghostly banks that the boys unshipped their oars and rested, Hal using one of them astern to guide the boat when necessary. And so the night wore away, the moon sank lower and lower in the west, the boat raced onwards towards the open bay, and Hal and Tom, worn out with exertion and the lack of sleep, leaned back in the stern and fell into a sound slumber which continued uninterrupted for many hours.

Very early in the morning Mother Tomson went as

usual to the foot of the garret stairs and called the boys.

"Hal! Tom! make 'aste an' come down. Father's gone to the barn.

But neither Hal nor Tom answered, and after calling them several times in vain Mother Tomson ascended to the garret, saying to herself as she went, "Whatever makes them boys sleep so late? Thank goodness thar ain't a show every day o' the week!"

When she reached the garret and saw the empty and disordered bed she stood a moment bewildered. "Land sakes!" she cried, "if they ain't up a'ready. They *hev* got an airy start *this* mornin', an' no mistake."

And suspecting nothing, Mother Tomson returned to her cooking.

When the farmer came in to breakfast he glanced round the kitchen and asked, "Mother, whar's the boys? I ain't seen 'em this mornin'."

"Not seen 'em?" cried Mother Tomson. "Why, they ain't a-bed!"

Without a word the farmer climbed the garret stairs. When he came back it was with a troubled face. He held Ffol's note in his hand.

"Mother," he said in a trembling voice, "the boys air gone. Read thet."

Mother Tomson's hand shook as she took the bit of paper.

"Deer mother tomson," she read, "don't be hard on me. I didn't kill the circus man he come on me suddin like and tried to strike me with a stick and I ris my hand with stone in it and some one in the crowd hit him with a stone and he tumbled down go-thump. Ned Croft sez I killed him but I didn't an I'm agoin away cause the cornstables are acomin to take me up and hang me and I didn't do it. Deer mother tomson forgiv me for runnin away and Little tom to and thanks for all your kindness and every-think were dreadful sorry and so goodby from hal."

The tears were streaming down Mother Tomson's cheeks long before she reached the last line. When she had read it all she threw her apron over her faee and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, Abr'am," she cried, "it's jest dreadful! Oh, the pore lad! He didn't do it, I know he didn't. But he's afeard of his life, an' so he's run away. An' little Tom too! Little Tom was a well-meanin' lad, he was. Not that t'other one warn't too. But Tom saved little Sarie Jane's life, so he did, an' somehow the little good-for-nothin's crep' inter my heart. Oh, whatever shell we do! whatever shell we do!"

Without a word Farmer Tomson left the kitchen. When out of doors he drew his shirt sleeve across his eyes and blew his nose very hard. For somehow the runaway boys had crept into his old heart too.

All that day the farmer searched for them. But

night came without bringing any tidings of the runaways, and people said they had probably "got a lift" in some waggon proceeding to Halifax. Nobody thought of the river; and as the boat which Hal had selected was old, several days passed before its absence was discovered.

CHAPTER VI.

PICKED UP—THE ESCAPE FROM THE SMUGGLER.

HAL awoke to find the boat lying high and dry on her bilge. The clear morning sunlight glinted and danced upon vast reaches of wet red sand, broken into frequent pools, and dotted with patches of olive-green sea-weed. Miles away across the shimmering sands abrupt red cliffs rose on either hand, crowned with trees, green fields, and farmhouses showing like tiny white specks in the distance.

"Well, I'm blest!" said Hal as he rose to his feet and looked about him; "the bay's as empty as my hat. What's become of all the water, I wonder? Tom! little Tom! wake up. We're ashore in the middle of the bay, and there's no water to take us anywhere."

Tom rubbed his eyes, blinked at the strong sunlight, and struggled to his feet. At first he looked from Hal to the boat, and from the boat to the sands, in utter bewilderment. Then the events of the past night came back to him, and his face brightened.

"Them's the flats," he said, pointing to the pool-

dotted sands; "I bin here afore, shad-fishin'. My eye, but I'm hungry, I am!"

"But what are we to do?" asked Hal, still puzzled. "There's no water to float the boat—where's it all gone, Tom?"

Tom turned towards the west, and pointed to where, far away on the horizon, a thin bright line shimmered from shore to shore.

"It's 'way down there, the water is," he said; "tide's out jest now, don't yer see. Bym-by it'll come back a-rushin' an' a-roarin' same's ever, it will."

Hal knew little or nothing about the mighty Bay of Fundy tide with its regular rise and fall of sixty or seventy feet. He had seen the muddy banks of the little river which ran past the settlement fill and empty every day, and he had heard this called "the tide." But that the whole bay for miles and miles should be left, as he expressed it, "as empty as his hat," was a phenomenon as startling and wonderful to his mind as that division of the Red Sea of which he had read in his Bible. His ideas of the exact location of that sea, too, were very indefinite; and as the shores and flats, and even the little water which had not gone out with the tide, were of a deep red hue, he hastily concluded that this could be none other than the famous Red Sea.

"I say, Tom, is this the place where Moses crossed?" he asked eagerly.

"Moses?" said Tom, shaking his head dubiously, "who's Moses? There's ol' Mose Clark up at the settlement, but he never crossed this 'ere bay as I heerd on. Folks sez a man crossed it wonst in a big iron pot, but I don't know what his name was, though it might 'a' bin Moses."

"But you know, Tom, it tells about it in the Bible—about Moses and the Red Sea," Hal explained.

"Never heerd on't," replied Tom; "mebby this 'ere's the place though, for it's as red as bricks, it is."

"But what makes all the water run out and then come back again?" asked Hal.

"I ain't got no book larnin'," replied Tom; "but git out them scraps of food, Hal, an' I'll tell you what I've heerd the boys say up at the settlement."

"It's orful queer 'bout these 'ere tides," he began musingly, after his hunger was somewhat appeased by a vigorous attack on the broken food which Hal produced from the box. "Some of the boys what goes to school sez as the master told 'em the man in the moon pulls 'em up an' pushes 'em back, though what he do it with, I don't know, I don't. Then there's some of the boys sez diff'r'nt. 'Cordin' to them there's a great big gi'nt what stan's down at the mouth of the bay, an' pushes the water up with a big iron shovel, an' then when he gits tired an' wades ashore to rest, why the water jest runs out agin. Hullo! the tide's a-comin' now, it is."

Tom sprang to his feet and pointed down the bay, where, fifty yards away, a foam-crested dyke of seething water was rushing towards them with the speed of a race-horse.

"The boat will be swamped!" cried Hal, alarmed by the rapid advance of the "bore."

"No, she won't," replied Tom quietly; "she's bow on, so she is. But you'd bes' throw out that kedge, so's to hold her."

Scarcely had Hal tumbled the kedge over the bow ere the "bore" was upon them. With a quivering leap, which almost knocked Hal off his feet, the boat swept on for a few yards upon the crest of the wave; then, as the kedge gripped the sand, she brought up with a jerk and a lurch which sent Tom sprawling over the thwarts, and floated in smooth water.

"Lucky you thought of the kedge, Tom," said Hal, shaking the spray from his coat, "or we'd have been swamped, sure. The thing won't come back, will it?"

"No," replied Tom, looking after the fast-receding line of muddy foam, and rubbing his elbow ruefully; "it won't come back this tide, it won't."

As the tide rose Hal paid out the kedge-rope, which, though old, served to hold the boat and prevent her drifting up the bay. Several hours passed, the current grew less and less, until it ceased altogether, and instead of the red sand-flats one wide expanse of water stretched from shore to shore. With the sun blazing

down upon them from an unclouded sky, they soon began to suffer terribly from thirst. They had not thought of bringing any fresh water, and even had the idea occurred to them, to carry it out would have been impracticable in the hurry of their flight.

"Ebb tide!" cried Tom at last; "up with the kedge, Hal. The tide's turned, it has."

Even as he spoke the boat swung round, and by the time the dripping kedge was drawn over the side the tide was setting strongly down the bay. They got out the oars, headed down the bay, and, aided by the current and a light breeze, soon left their place of anchorage far behind. Parched with thirst though they were, Hal dared not put ashore for water so near the place from which they had fled.

They had rowed for about an hour, when Hal suddenly called out, "Tom, there's a vessel ahead!"

"She's a schooner, she is," said Tom, turning in his place to obtain a better view. "Le's go aboard and git some water, Hal."

Hal assenting, they bent to their oars, and were soon under the schooner's stern. The vessel lay almost motionless, her sails flapping idly against the masts in the fitful breeze. Two men were on deck, one at the wheel, the other leaning lazily over the taffrail; but neither of them took any notice of the boat or its occupants.

"I say, mister!" Tom sang out, "will you take us

aboard? We ain't got no water, and we're orful thirsty, we are."

The man at the rail slowly turned his head, and after regarding them for a moment in silence, cleared his mouth of tobacco juice and said, "Went adrif, I s'pose?"

"Yes," replied Hal, fearful of telling the whole truth.

"The *Nancy Lee's* the name o' this ship," continued the man, "an' I'm her captain. Want aboard, des ye? Wal, I guess you may come. On'y, if I picks you up the boat's mine, I reckon. Row 'longside an' I'll heave you a line."

"There's drink," said the captain, when they stood on deck, pointing to a cask to which a rusty tin was attached by a piece of rope-yarn.

The boys drank eagerly of the mawkish water, after which they took a survey of the schooner. There were only two seamen besides the captain and the man at the wheel, whom the former addressed as "mate." Hal had not been ten minutes on the schooner's deck before he repented leaving the boat; for, though there was nothing in the manner or looks of the two "hands" to cause him alarm, the appearance of the captain and his mate was anything but reassuring. The captain, he soon discovered, had an ugly way of regarding him out of the corners of his eyes which strongly roused his suspicions.

But from the mate he shrank in positive alarm. This man lurched rather than walked, as though momentarily expecting a blow, or as if stooping to deal one to a fallen enemy. His mouth was constantly distorted into a smile of grim wickedness, the effect of which was heightened rather than concealed by an enormous shaggy beard. His eye, for he had but one, shaded by lowering brows, was for all the world like the stern-port of some old-time pirate cruiser through which the death-dealing gun showed grimly. If the missing eye at all resembled the remaining one, its loss was not much to be regretted, Hal thought; for a wickeder eye he had never in all his life seen.

Both captain and mate chewed tobacco incessantly, and flooded the deck with its juice, being apparently too lazy to step to the rail to expectorate. Wherever they went, too, there was noticeable a strong odour of rum. Indeed, the whole vessel was redolent of rum and tobacco, even the drinking-tin attached to the water-cask smelt strongly of these.

Perceiving that Hal observed this, the mate approached him and said, "What you sniffin' at, you lubber? Don't you know tar when you smells it?"

Later in the day the sky became overcast, and assumed the appearance of an approaching storm. Tom lay down on the deck forward of the cabin, and fell asleep. Having nothing better to do, Hal at last stretched himself by Tom's side, where he too fell

into a sound slumber, which continued far into the night.

He woke with a start and a shiver, to find it pitch dark and raining heavily. The wind had risen, the schooner pitched about in a most distressing manner, while an occasional dash of spray swept over the deck. Hal rose to his feet thinking he would move about a little, when he was suddenly arrested by the sound of voices.

Peering through the darkness he discovered a cabin window directly above his head to be open. A light shone through it, and the voices he had heard seemed to proceed from the same opening. He crept nearer and peeped in. At a table in the centre of the cabin sat the captain and mate of the vessel. A dim oil lamp swung above their heads, and on the table were a black bottle and some glasses. The two were drinking and talking. Something the mate said made Hal draw back quickly and listen with bated breath.

"I don't like havin' them boys aboard, cap'n," the mate was saying. "We'll fall in with t'other craft agin daylight, an' 'tain't safe work takin' in rum an' terbacker with them young cubs about. Thet big un's got his eye-teeth cut, I rayther guess. He's kep' his weather eye open, too, sence he took passage in this ship. I've kep' 'im in sight, cap'n, an' blamed if I ain't afeared he'll blab, once he gits ashore."

The mate paused to apply his glass to his lips before

he proceeded. "Y'see, cap'n, 'taint so much gittin' *in* this precious cargo of ourn, es gittin' it *out* agin. Craft what air out-an'-out coasters don't lan' terbacker an' rum in the ded o' night under the lee o' a cliff; an' thar ain't a boy what wears breeches es don't know it. Moreover, this big un's full o' s'picious chock up to the bung-hole. Soon's he sot foot on deck what des he do but begin keepin' a sharp look-out ahead, so ter speak. *I seen him.*"

"A tarnation fool I was ever to take 'em aboard, Bill," cried the captain, bringing his dirty fist down on the table with a tremendous thump. "I reckoned thet boat was vallible, or I wouldn't 'a' done it. But here they be; so what's to be done, mate?"

"They seen too much a'ready to be sot ashore, cap'n," said the mate significantly.

"Right y'are, mate," replied the captain. "But why not put 'em down b'low? No cargo's agoin' in the arfter hol'. If they blabs no more'n what they sees thar, why, scuttle my schooner! 'twon't do *us* no harm, ha, ha!"

"But they *hev* seen a'ready, cap'n," said the mate. "'Sides, they hev ears, them young cubs hev, an' they'll larn a mighty sight more'n they hed orte larn, even if so be es you puts 'em in the arfter hol'."

"What they can't see they can't know nothin' about," said the captain doggedly.

"They can hear an' smell, cap'n," retorted the

mate. "Rum's too *nosey* a article to be hid, an' so's terbacker. They've been a-sniffin' roun' the deck the hul arternoon, an' there ain't so much aboard yet neither. It's a big risk to run, cap'n, a-lettin' them ashore agin with the smell o' the cargo in their noses."

"Then what do you perpose *to* do, Bill Hoggins?" asked the captain.

The mate lowered his voice until Hal could scarcely hear him speak. "Cap'n," said he in words full of dark meaning, "ded men sees no sights they hadn't order see, an' tells no tales they hadn't order tell. Same with ded boys. We'll send 'em down *below*; but not into the arfter hol', cap'n, not into the arfter hol'."

The captain was silent for some moments. "A *reesky* bisness, thet," he said at length in tones as low as those of his companion; "a *reesky* bisness, Bill."

"So's smugglin'," replied the mate promptly. "If you an' me was to be caughted, cap'n, there's thet agin us a'ready es would make us both swing. A neckercher's a deal easier 'bout a seaman's neck nor a gallus main-brace, cap'n. I don't like vi'lence no more'n you do; but I hev no min' to let them young lubbers git me into difficulties."

The captain laughed hoarsely. "I reckon you're on the right tack thar, mate," he said; "but, scuttle my schooner! how's the thing to be done?"

"Leave that to me," was the reply. "You an' me air in the same boat, cap'n, and 'tain't the fust time

I've hove ballast over the side rather'n hev the boat sink under us." Saying which the mate swallowed another dram and left the cabin.

Quick as thought Hal threw himself down by little Tom's side and feigned sleep. He heard the mate stumble out of the cabin and shuffle along the deck to where he lay. Here the villain stopped and touched Hal gently with his foot to make sure the lad was asleep. Through his half-open lids Hal saw that he carried a heavy marline-spike in his hand.

Hal lay quite still, though his heart beat so loudly that he felt sure the mate must hear it. Fortunately, before the latter could carry out his villainous purpose, the man at the wheel shouted something which caused him to turn away and hurry aft.

Hal immediately roused little Tom, whom he dragged to the deeper shadow of the bulwarks, bidding him keep still for his life. The painter of the boat, which was still towing astern, though Hal's box had been hoisted on deck, was soon found. The sea was rough, and to pull the boat alongside no easy matter; but life itself depended upon that boat, and by exerting all his strength, Hal presently succeeded in accomplishing the task. This done, he bade Tom descend with as little noise as possible; and when his companion was safe in the boat, Hal gave the painter a couple of turns about a stanchion to make it more secure and followed him over the side.

Scarcely had his feet touched the boat when the mate returned to the spot where, three minutes before, he had left the boys asleep. Here he groped for a moment in the darkness, then called aloud to the boys, and, receiving no answer, swore a terrible oath and rushed to the schooner's side.

The roar of wind and waves effectually drowned the noise made by the mate until he reached the rail. Then Hal, who was fumbling about in the dark vainly endeavouring to loosen the painter from its ring-bolt, heard him. In another moment discovery would have been certain and escape impossible. But in that moment Hal drew his clasp-knife, and with one desperate slash severed the straining rope.

With a heavy lurch the schooner left the boat behind, and Hal and Tom found themselves exposed to all the fury of the raging tempest.

CHAPTER VII.

RUN DOWN—THE OLD BLOCK-HOUSE.

HAL and Tom had escaped one danger only to encounter another. It seemed that every wave must overwhelm the tiny craft which was now their only hope, so great was the fury of the storm. The spray, breaking high overhead, drenched them to the skin, and momentarily threatened to send them to the bottom. So profound was the darkness which intervened between the lightning flashes that Hal could scarcely distinguish the form of little Tom crouching by his side.

With much difficulty he got one of the oars out astern and attempted to bring the boat's head to the sea; but scarcely was the oar in position when a seething wave snapped it in two like a pipe-stem. At the same moment he was startled by a cry from little Tom, who, clinging to the boat's side for support, half rose and pointed ahead as a brilliant lightning-flash lit up the black waste of waters.

"Hal! oh, Hal! there's somethin' a-comin' down on us, there is!"

At the cry Hal turned his head quickly and saw, not twenty yards away, the black outline of a vessel bearing directly down upon them with all the swiftness of the wind.

There was no time for outcry, no time for action, even had action been possible in the sea then running. Almost before the lurid flash was lost in the blackness there came a terrific crash, and the next moment Hal found himself clinging desperately to the keel of the capsized boat.

His first thought was for the safety of little Tom. He called his companion by name, and to his great joy heard Tom's voice shouting back a reply.

"Tom, where are you?" he called again.

"Here; atop o' the boat. I'm jolly wet, I am," came the answer through the darkness.

Gripping the keel firmly with both hands, Hal dragged himself in the direction of the sound until he made out the figure of little Tom lying flat along the bottom of the boat. With difficulty he succeeded in clambering up beside him, and there, with one arm about his young companion and one hand grasping the keel, he waited for what the darkness and the storm might yet bring of danger or of safety.

But a kindly Providence watched over the boys, and after a time the gale began to decrease in violence and the sea to subside. Then the moon peeped through the scudding clouds and enabled Hal to look about

him. To the right he saw black cliffs and a line of phosphorescent foam where the waves broke on the beach.

"Come up, Tom!" he cried; "we're not so very far from land after all. We may drift ashore yet."

"It's precious wet and cold here," replied little Tom with a shiver; "but it's a sight better'n it was, so it is."

To their great joy they soon perceived that they were indeed nearing the shore. A current, which here set strongly landwards, had got the boat in its grip. But when within a stone's-throw of safety, to their dismay the boat suddenly took a direction parallel to the beach, and it soon became evident that the current had changed its course and was again carrying her out to sea. Hal saw that their only hope of reaching land was to swim for it.

"Tom, can you swim?" he asked.

"Like a fish, I kin," replied Tom promptly.

"The boat's drifting into the bay again. We must take to the water, Tom."

"A' right," said Tom cheerfully; "we can't get no wetter'n we are, I guess, so come on."

Slipping into the water without further ado, they struck out for the beach. The distance was greater than they had calculated, and, weighed down with their wet clothes, and benumbed by exposure as they were, to reach it was no easy task. But safety drew

nearer at every stroke, and bravely they held to their purpose, Hal cheering little Tom with encouraging words until at last they felt the solid land once more beneath their feet, and, staggering beyond reach of the waves, threw themselves upon the wet sand, dripping and exhausted.

"Aren't you glad, Tom?" asked Hal when able to speak.

"Orful," replied Tom with emphatic brevity.

"Tom, I think we ought to say a prayer; don't you?"

"A' right. You be the passon an' I'll say 'Amen,'" replied Tom in tones which forbade any suspicion of irreverence.

Kneeling on the wet sand, with little Tom by his side, Hal reverently repeated the "Our Father."

"Amen!" added Tom solemnly.

"Say, 'Thank God,' Tom."

"Thank you, God!" said little Tom.

It was now daylight, and the boys began to consider how they should obtain food. The cliffs which here overhung the beach were both lofty and precipitous: to climb them was out of the question. About a mile to the left, however, there appeared a break in this impassable wall; and, benumbed and weary though they were, the boys made their way slowly along the sands towards it.

"There ought to be farmhouses up there," observed

Hal, pointing to the top of the cliff. "We must get something to eat somewhere, and a place to stop. Are you hungry, Tom?"

"Orful," replied Tom. "Wish I had some of Mother Tomson's stirabout, I do."

Hal was himself nearly famished, for they had eaten nothing since the previous morning, the hospitality of those on board the schooner having extended no farther than a draught of water.

Reaching the break in the cliffs, they found the beach strewn with quantities of hewn timber and chips. But what interested them most at that moment was a waggon-road leading to the higher land above. Following this road they soon reached the top of the cliff, but to their great disappointment not a house was to be seen. A tall second-growth of spruce and juniper lined the roadsides, and seemingly stretched away in unbroken wildness to the very foot of the forest-clad hills beyond.

A brook purred by the roadside, and, after a refreshing draught of its cool, clear water, they tramped on in the hope of coming upon a house where they might beg a little food.

"Yon's a house, it is!" cried Tom gleefully, as they came to a break in the trees on the right.

A house of some sort it certainly was, and leaving the road they made towards it. The walls were built of logs, neatly hewn and closely joined, but containing

not a single window. What was more remarkable, about ten feet from the ground the sides of the building projected horizontally for full a yard, and this overhanging portion, as well as the continuation of the wall to the eaves, was pierced by long, narrow apertures. The whole structure had the appearance of an enormous pigeon hutch.

"Blest if ever I seed a house like that afore!" exclaimed Tom, surveying the structure with puzzled face. "There ain't no winders nor chimbley to it, so there ain't."

"Does look rather queer," assented Hal; "something like Mother Tomson's pewter pepper-box. Let's have a look at the inside, Tom."

There were no signs of life about the place, and finding a door on the other side of the building, the boys pushed it open and entered. Despite the absence of windows, enough light found its way through the doorway and the upright slits in the upper walls to enable them to make out that the place contained nothing whatever save a heap of mouldy straw and a fireplace of rough stones, terminating in a rude chimney. Many of the stones had fallen to the floor, which was much decayed in parts, as were also the roof and walls.

"Don't b'long to nobody, this don't," observed Tom; "an' there is a chimbley, too, though it don't show outside. S'posin' we moves in, Hal?"

"Just what I was thinking," Hal replied. "The place is dry and warm and unoccupied. We'll stay, Tom—at anyrate, till we're turned out."

"There ain't nothin' t'eat here, so there ain't," Tom rejoined reflectively.

"I've an idea there are houses further up the road. You stay here and set the place to rights a bit while I go and see."

"Don't b'long!" Tom called out as Hal disappeared.

Feeling desperately hungry, Hal set out at a brisk pace in search of a farmhouse, when suddenly he espied a young girl sitting on the roadside beside a huge basket of chips. The girl caught sight of Hal at the same moment, and rising hastily swung the basket upon her arm with an effort, and walked slowly away up the road.

"Stop!" cried Hal, running forward; "that basket's too heavy for you. Let me take it, do." And without waiting for permission he slipped his arm through the handle, and trudged on by the girl's side.

"Thank you," said the girl, looking up at him shyly. After a pause she asked: "What might your name be?"

"My name's Hal. And yours?"

"Is Millie Pratt," said the girl with a blush, as she tossed a troublesome curl of sunny hair back from her forehead.

"Do you live near here, Millie?" asked Hal.

Millie blushed again and said, "Yes, just yonder in the hollow. Where do you live?"

"Nowhere," said Hal with a laugh. Then, seeing Millie look puzzled, he told her how he and little Tom had been run down in an open boat, and how they had found their way to this spot.

Millie, who girl-like at once regarded Hal as a hero, was much interested. "And where's little Tom now?" she wanted to know.

"He's back there a bit, in the old house," Hal explained.

"Oh!" said Millie, "in the old block-house. Won't he be afraid?"

"No; what is there to be afraid of?" asked Hal in some surprise.

"Oh, nothing," rejoined Millie hastily. "This is where I live, and there's mother putting out the washing."

They turned into a footpath leading to a small house, before which a woman, with a red handkerchief tied over her head, was busy pinning some newly-washed linen upon a long line.

"Mother, oh, mother!" cried Millie, "here's a poor boy that's been washed ashore from a boat, and he's carried my basket all the way from the top of the cliff. There's another boy with him, but he stayed behind in the old block-house, mother."

"Child alive! whatever are you sayin'?" exclaimed Mrs. Pratt, dropping some wet linen back into the basket, and regarding her daughter and the stranger with unfeigned surprise.

"Please, ma'am," said Hal, placing the basket of chips on the ground and taking off his cap, "I'm the boy; and little Tom, he's back yonder tidying up the old house a bit."

Mrs. Pratt looked Hal all over, and the survey evidently pleased her, for she approached and touched his coat, exclaiming as she did so, "Bless my stars! if the boy ain't all wet, an' salt water too! Millie," turning to her daughter, "run in an' lay the table, an' set out that dish of cold pork an' beans, for like as not the pore lad's a'most perished. An', Millie! be sure an' don't let the cat in the pantry."

Shaking back her bright curls Millie tripped away, while the kind-hearted mother proceeded to hang out the remainder of the washing, talking to Hal as she did so.

"Land sakes! to think of you out in all that gale, an' you sech a bit of a lad, too! an' t'other un littler'n you, you say. It's a maracle you wasn't drowned. An' sech a wettin', too—'nough to give you your deaths. But talkin' won't fill nobody's insides, an' yourn's empty enough, I'll be bound. So come right straight into the kitchen an' git somethin' t'eat."

Leading the way into the house, she placed a chair

by the kitchen table, already laid with a snowy cloth and a huge dish of pork and beans.

"There," cried the motherly body, "set in an' pick up a bit, for I'm sure you want it badly after sech a night."

Needing no second bidding, Hal seated himself at the table, and began a ravenous attack upon the food, while shy Millie cast furtive glances at her new friend and hero from the window, to which she had retreated.

"Land sakes! jest see the pore boy eat! It des one's heart good only to look at him," exclaimed her mother.

Hal suddenly thought of Tom, and laid down his knife and fork.

"Shorely you ain't had enough a'ready?" cried Mrs. Pratt. "Eat it all up, sonny, an' don't be bashful."

"Please, ma'am," said Hal, "I'd like to take some to little Tom, if you wouldn't mind."

"Course you shell take some to little Tom! But jest you eat up all that's afore you. There's plenty more where that come from, an' I'll git some ready for little Tom while you're a-cleaning that plate," replied the kind-hearted woman as she bustled into the pantry.

By the time Hal had finished, she returned with a whole pyramid of cold meat and bread. "There," she said, plumping the plate down upon the table,

"that's for little Tom; an' I guess he won't be hungry for *one* day. Didn't you say he was at the old block-house, sonny? You don't mean to sleep there, do you?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Hal; "that is, if they'll let us."

"Oh, nobody'll hinder you," said Mrs. Pratt; "leastways," she added, "no human folks."

Hal stared on hearing this.

"There, now," she continued, "p'raps I'm doin' wrong to tell you, but they do say that the old block-house is haunted."

Hal stared harder than ever. "Haunted? Please, I don't understand."

"I oughtn't 'a' told you, I know," said Mrs. Pratt, self-reproachfully. "My tongue's allus a-trippin' me up that way. But its common talk hereabouts that ghosts walk in the old block-house o' nights. I don't b'lieve it myself, but them as says they've seen 'em with their own eyes, declares it's true."

Hal laughed and said he was not afraid; and, having taken leave of Millie, and thanked her kind-hearted mother again and again, he carried the plate of bread and meat back to little Tom.

CHAPTER VIII.

KING COLE THE HERMIT.

WHAT, ho! within there! Is this the respect new subjects bring? Down on your marrow bones before your king!"

Hal dropped a stone and a lump of clay with which he was repairing the tumble-down chimney, and Tom looked up from his breakfast with his mouth full of bread and meat, as these singular words woke the echoes in the cobwebby corners of the old block-house.

The speaker, or rather the shouter, stood in the open doorway, surveying the occupants of the block-house with whimsical gravity. And a strange-looking individual he was. His feet were bare, as were his legs to the knee, above which point they were cased in a pair of buckle breeches of ancient cut. An old red military jacket, adorned with highly-polished brass buttons, and a hempen rope about the middle, from which dangled a much-battered sword, completed his singular costume.

"Who are you? Do you own this place?" asked Hal, advancing to the door.

"I'm King Cole the Hermit, and I own not only this shanty, but the whole country as well," replied the stranger, swinging a great staff which he carried to indicate the extent of his possessions. "Edward, Duke of Kent, made it over to me by royal charter. See, here's my crown," said he, taking off a ragged soldier's-cap, fantastically trimmed with bits of tinsel and rows of shells.

"Won't you come in?" asked Hal, more amused than frightened by the old fellow's eccentric manner and speech.

"Though I've eat not a morsel to-day, I'm monarch of all I survey," quoth King Cole, walking into the block-house and coolly helping himself to the remainder of Tom's bread and meat.

When he had disposed of the last morsel, he began to sing in a quavering voice:

"Oh, Old King Cole is a jolly old soul,
And a jolly old soul is he;
He calls for his pipe—"

Thereupon he broke off abruptly, and pulling the blackened stump of a clay pipe from his jacket pocket, lighted it and puffed away in silence until the place was filled with clouds of smoke.

At last the hermit knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Come and see my castle," he cried. "The time of the sentry on guard now ends, or I'd stay with you

longer, my noble young friends. Come and see my castle."

Picking up his stick he ran out of the house and across the clearing towards the thick bushes as nimbly as a boy. Hal and Tom, curious to know more about this funny old man, followed. He ran so fast that it was with difficulty they could keep him in sight, and at last a bend in the narrow pathway quite hid him from view.

Hurrying after, they presently found themselves in a small grassy clearing at the foot of a steep hill commanding a fine view of the bay. Here they caught sight of the hermit again. He stood before a low bark-covered hut, built with stones and logs against the steep slope of the hill. The door of the hut was open, and directly in front of it crouched a bull-dog, who growled savagely as the boys approached.

"Down, John Bull!" cried the hermit; "the friends of your master are free to go past, sir."

The dog became quiet at once, and with his tail wagged a grudging welcome to his master's new friends.

"Relieve guard!" cried the hermit.

The bull-dog rose, and giving a sort of military salute with his fore-paw, marched slowly into the hut. No sooner had he disappeared than a large African parrot strutted out, and hopping upon a low perch beside the doorway also saluted the hermit.

"Attention!" cried the hermit, addressing the parrot. "What's the countersign, Lord Chancellor?"

"Dead men's bones! dead men's bones!" screamed Lord Chancellor, saluting again.

"Right," said the hermit; "see you don't forget it."

"See you don't forget it, King Cole! see you don't forget it!" screamed the parrot.

Attracted by these singular proceedings the boys approached nearer, when Lord Chancellor caught sight of them. "Who goes there? The countersign! Stand, or I fire!" he screamed.

"Friends," replied the hermit, "friends of King Cole, the jolly old soul."

"Pass on," cried Lord Chancellor; "friends of King Cole, the jolly old soul, old soul, old soul!"

"This is my castle," said the hermit with a magnificent sweep of his hand towards the miserable hut, "enter."

John Bull, who was lying curled up before an inner door, growled as they passed in.

"Say 'Dead men's bones,'" whispered the hermit.

"Dead men's bones," said Hal aloud; and at the word "bones" John Bull shut his rapacious-looking mouth with a snap and subsided into silence.

Along one side of the hut bunks were fitted up against the wall, after the manner of a ship's cabin; while on the other were ranged a rough deal table, a gun, a brace of pistols, and a sailor's sheath-knife.

The hut was much more spacious than an outside view had led the boys to suppose. It extended, indeed, for several feet under the hill, and where it abutted on the latter there was a door which excited their curiosity not a little.

"The lord of the castle lays off his crown and bids you both welcome. My young friends, sit down," cried the hermit, motioning Hal to a stool and Tom to the floor, while he himself perched on the edge of the table, after placing his shell-covered cap on the head of John Bull, who looked so funny that the boys laughed heartily.

Tom was busily chewing a huge quid of spruce gum which he had "picked" from the trees in the vicinity of the block-house that morning to stay his hunger in Hal's absence. Observing Tom's jaws in motion the hermit extended his grimy hand, exclaiming in his funny recitative:

"Them as gives to the poor to the good Lord lend—give us a chaw of gum, my noble young friend!"

Tom laughingly divided the pink quid and handed over half to King Cole, who popped it into his mouth and began cracking his jaws with great gusto. Such a condescension on the part of the hermit Tom accepted as strong evidence of friendship, and on the strength of it he made bold to propound a question.

"How long 'a' you lived here, Mister Cole?" he asked.

"*King* Cole's my name, my noble young friend," replied the hermit chewing up his gum and words together, "and the years I've lived here, they number just ten."

"What's behin' yon door?" continued Tom, pointing to the mysterious portal at the back of the hut, which seemed to lead directly into the heart of the hill.

"Spirits," answered the hermit, dropping his voice to a whisper.

"Spurts!" echoed Tom in astonishment.

"Ay," replied the hermit, "French and Injun and Red-jacket spirits that fell a-bleeding round the old block-house yonder in the benighted middle ages before I began my reign benign. You can see the marks of the bullets and arrers that killed 'em, in the timbers of the old shanty yet. I've got 'em all barrelled up in yonder"—jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the hill, a motion at which John Bull growled—"and only let 'em out o' nights by way of a leetle ree-creation. You'll hear 'em to-night, them spirits, dancing and yelling and scalping each other round the block-house, until it's daylight."

"They won't hurt us, will they?" asked Hal, laughing at what he took to be a mad freak of the hermit's fancy, and quite forgetting the strange remark let fall by Mrs. Pratt.

"Maybe they will and maybe they won't," replied

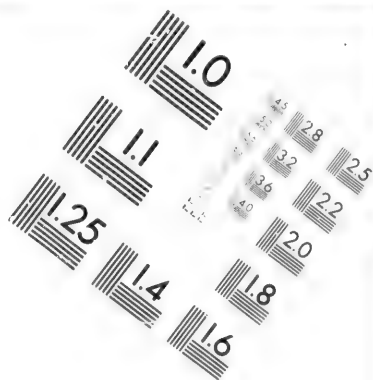
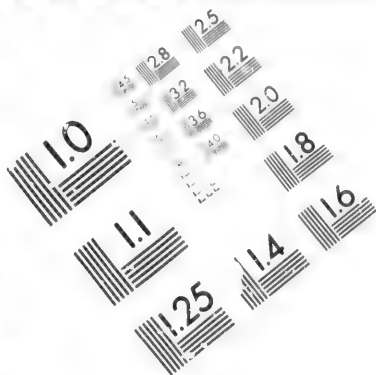
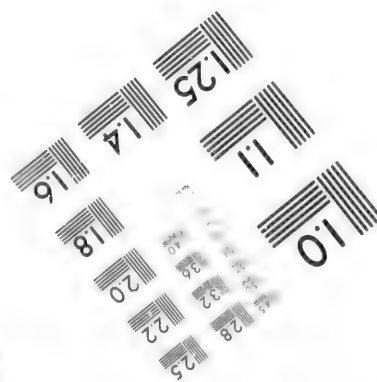
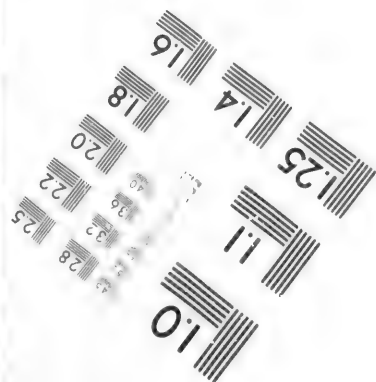
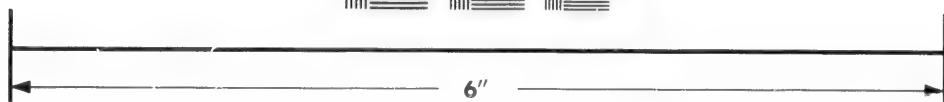
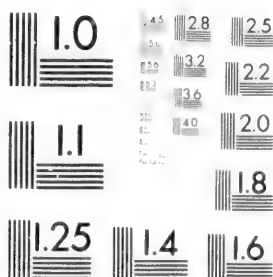


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)



Photographic
Sciences
Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 872-4503

45
42
38
36
32
28
25
22
20
18

10

the hermit; "howsomever, I wouldn't stay there overnight if I were you. A whole head is better than no bed, and walking till you groans better than broken bones."

At mention of the word "bones" John Bull growled, and opened his ugly jaws so wide that the crown tumbled to the ground. Snatching it up and darting out of the hut, King Cole bounded away into the bushes, leaving the boys staring after him in astonishment.

No sooner did the hermit disappear than John Bull began to show signs of aggressiveness so unmistakable that they considered it best to retire, which they accordingly did without delay. When within sight of the block-house Hal saw Millie sitting on the door-sill waiting for them.

"Please, Hal," she said, uncovering a small basket as they came up, "mother says will you take this for your supper, and if you want some straw to sleep on, there's lots in the barn."

As it was now near sunset Hal despatched little Tom to the beach for an armful of chips, while he went to the farm with Millie to fetch the straw. When he returned he brought some matches in his pocket; and as it grew dark the boys sat down and ate their supper before a cheery fire which they had kindled in the old chimney. Then they barred the door with a stout piece of stick, and making a rough but sweet-smelling

"shake-down" bed on the floor, curled themselves up side by side in the straw for the night.

So weary were they that never once did they think of the doubtful character borne by their new lodging. They were destined, however, to have it brought very vividly to mind before many hours.

How long he had slept Hal could not tell, when suddenly he found himself sitting bolt upright and little Tom clinging to him in terror. The fire, which had been blazing brightly when they fell asleep, was quite burnt out, leaving the place so horribly dark that peering into it and seeing nothing made Hal's eyes ache. For his life he could not tell what had caused him to wake so suddenly. He knew only that a vague, distressing sense of fear clutched at his heart, for which he could not account.

"What's the matter, little un?" he asked when he discovered Tom's arms about him.

"I heer'd somethin'," said little Tom in a frightened whisper; "an' I don' know what it is, I don't. If I knowed I wouldn't mind; but it was so *orful* it med me all creepy like."

Hal listened but could hear nothing. "What was it like, Tom?" he asked.

"Don' know as I kin splain it," said Tom; "on'y it went *dong, dong, dong* three times, jest like a meetin'-house bell in a big hole. Oh cricky! there it goes agin!"

Hal heard it plainly enough now, although the sound was so strangely faint that it seemed to him the mere buzzing of a mosquito must have quite drowned it in that awful midnight stillness.

Dong—dong—dong!

The deep vibrating note of a bell, muffled and unearthly, yet so near that the very air about them quivered at every clang of its iron tongue.

"'Tain't no or'nary meetin'-house bell, so it ain't," little Tom whispered. "They sed the place's haunted, so they did, an' them's the spurts a-talkin', mebbly."

"Hist!" said Hal; "there it goes again."

Dong—dong—dong! came the awful sound through the still darkness. Hal put his ear to the floor and listened breathlessly.

Dong—dong—dong! The weird, muffled note clanged out beneath their very feet.

"Tom," whispered Hal, the sweat standing out on his forehead in great drops—"Tom, it's down in the ground."

Together they stooped and listened, but could hear nothing; and though they lay long awake, momentarily expecting that awesome clangour to penetrate the timbers upon which they lay, not a sound broke the stillness until the birds began their morning song.

CHAPTER IX

DEAD-MAN'S CAVE.

WITH daylight fear fled, and laughing heartily at their own timidity Hal and Tom concluded they had foolishly allowed themselves to be deceived by the tinkling bell of some stray cow.

While raking about amongst a weed-grown heap of rubbish near the door, Hal found an old hatchet. This was a most valuable acquisition, and he forthwith proceeded to sharpen it upon a stone and to fit it with a handle, which he fashioned out of a bit of hardwood with the aid of his clasp-knife.

This done, the first use he made of the hatchet was to cut down a small mountain-ash which grew near, and hew its straight tough stem into a strong bar for the block-house door; for, though Hal could neither drive horses, nor milk cows, as he had confessed to the worthy farmer, he could handle tools, and handle them very well too, having learned something of their use in that East-end Home from which he had emigrated. When this bar was slipped into place in the stout irons which were fixed in the heavy framework, the door resisted like a rock all pressure from without.

"That's safe!" exclaimed Hal with satisfaction when the job was completed.

"An' there ain't no key-hole for the spurts to crawl through, nuther," remarked Tom with a laugh.

Hal's next attempt was at fitting up a sleeping-place for himself and Tom. With the help of some pieces of old board which lay about, he succeeded in constructing against the wall a rough but tolerably comfortable bunk. Into this Tom wove a springy mattress of sweet-smelling cedar boughs, the straw being reserved for blankets.

"Now," said Tom, when all was finished, "le's go down ter the beach an' dig some clams for dinner. Orter be heaps of 'em in the sandy bit where we come ashore t'other night, an' they makes right good eatin' cooked in their shells, so they des. 'Sides, we can't allus eat off Mrs. Pratt."

Hal assenting, they were soon on the beach. That portion of the sands as yet uncovered by the incoming tide was, as Tom had predicted, full of clams. A couple of sharpened sticks served for spades, and they were not long in turning out a goodly quantity of the succulent shell-fish. These they heaped into a dilapidated basket which Tom had found on the way down.

Turning to retrace their steps, they found themselves directly opposite a cave, which they had not before noticed.

"Let's have a look at it," said Hal, indicating the cave with a nod of his head.

"A' right," assented Tom with his usual readiness; and the basket of shell-fish was accordingly left on the sands against their return.

The bottom of the gaping aperture in the cliff which formed the entrance to the cave was considerably lower than the surface of the beach, being, in fact, the continuation of a deep, narrow creek which, running in from the bay like a great feeler, here broke the continuity of the sands.

"That creek runs into the cave," observed Hal; "there must be enough water inside there to float a ship's boat when the tide's up."

"'Tain't up now, an' the crik's dry; so le's go in," said Tom, leading the way as he spoke.

Hal scrambled down the side of the creek and followed his companion into the cavern. They had not proceeded far when they encountered a ledge of rock as high as Tom's head, forming an abrupt termination to the creek. The light shone but dimly here, and it was some time before Hal discovered a number of rude step-like indentations in the rock, up which they climbed.

Scarcely had they reached the top when Tom seized Hal's arm. "Oh my eye! Jest look there!" he cried, pointing before him.

Within a yard of the spot where they stood, grimly

outlined against the glistening green ooze of the cavern wall, was a human skeleton! With one bony hand the horrible object clutched a rope which dangled dimly from the dripping roof above.

As they realized the real nature of the thing with which they stood face to face, the boys shrank back against the opposite wall, unable either to leave the spot or to take their eyes off their unearthly *vis-à-vis*.

"A skillington!" gasped Tom; "a orful hewming skillington! Jest see how he's a-grinnin' at us, Hal! Ol' King Cole sed as there was spurts about, an' now here's one a-comin' at us, so there is!"

But by this time Hal had begun to recover somewhat from his first fright. "Don't be afraid, little un," he said reassuringly; "it can't hurt us, for it's dead, you know."

"But," protested Tom, still shrinking close to the wall, "the critter's got his arm riz. Don't go near him or he'll strike, Hal. Them atomies is orful things!"

Hal's courage having now returned in full force, he approached until he stood face to face with the skeleton. Tom held his breath, but, perceiving that no harm befell his companion, he also crept nearer.

"I see," said Hal, after a close examination of the skeleton. "The block-house must be directly above us, and this old chap's the one who rang the bell we heard last night. There's the bell overhead, Tom, and that's the bell-rope he's holding on to."

"How des he do it?" asked Tom. "He ain't got no pull in him, he ain't, no more'n a log. Tetch the ol' bare-bones up a bit, Hal, an' le's see how he works."

Hal gave the skeleton a poke in the ribs, which set it bobbing and rattling in a most horrible manner. With the motion the bell clanged two or three times, but ceased when the skeleton became still.

"But how des he manage it at night? There ain't no one here then to tetch him up, so there ain't," objected Tom.

This had not occurred to Hal. At first he thought the ringing of the bell on the previous night must have been due to the wind; but on second thought he remembered that the night had been perfectly calm. A further examination of the skeleton bell-ringer solved the mystery.

The bell was hung at the end of a long wooden lever, which moved upon an iron support fixed in the roof. The feet of the skeleton rested on the head of an empty cask, and this cask was sunk in a cavity in the floor of the cave, so that at first sight its presence was unsuspected.

"You see, Tom," explained Hal, after he had satisfied himself as to the manner in which the apparatus worked, "this cask's sunk in a hole, and when the tide rises high enough, the water gets in round it somehow and lifts it up. The weight of the bell on that stick

nearly balances the skeleton, so whenever the cask rises, why, it stands to reason the skeleton must move and ring the bell."

"Y-e-s," said Tom, doubtfully; "but what I want to know is, what's the bell for?"

"That I can't say," replied Hal; "unless," he added as a happy after-thought, "it's got something to do with the smugglers who run the *Nancy Lee*."

"My eye!" exclaimed Tom in great excitement, "that's jest it, Hal. You said as how that crik ud float a boat at high-water, an' this's where they land their stuff, I reckon."

"Still," said Hal, "I don't exactly see what the skeleton is for. They could land their stuff without his help, couldn't they?"

"Course they could," replied Tom readily; "but don't yer see, they can't git their boat outter this 'cept at high-water; so at high-water the bar'l floats an' the skillington rings the bell to tell 'em it's time to be off."

"That sounds likely," said Hal; "and, besides, it would scare away anybody who happened to enter the cave. I wonder what's in yonder?" pointing towards the dark inner cavern.

"Tetch the skillington up agin till we hears his bones rattle," said Tom, who now seemed to derive a sort of grim amusement from the antics of the "atomic," "an' then we'll go an' hev a look."

Hal gave the skeleton a push that made the very

teeth rattle in the grinning skull, and set the bell a-jangling loudly.

"I wonder, now," he observed as the echoes died away in the dark recesses of the cave, "if the old hermit knows anything about this."

He had scarcely uttered the words, when who should appear but the hermit himself! Where he came from the boys could not tell, for he seemed to emerge from the solid wall of the cave.

"Hail! my noble young friends," he cried; "and you, too, Sir Bones," he added, grasping the skeleton's disengaged hand and giving it a shake which caused the bell to wake the echoes again.

"Wh—where did *you* come from, King Cole?" Hal asked when he had recovered a little.

"From the abode of the spirits," replied King Cole with a frightful grimace. "Toll for the dead, the dead who are no more! He's a rattling good fellow is this subject of mine, though Davy Jones has picked his bones and stowed 'em here in his locker. What do you think of my dungeon?"

"Dungeon!—what dungeon?" asked Hal.

"This dungeon—'Dead-man's Cave.' There's heaps of 'em inside yonder. Cross-bones and death's-heads, heaps of 'em. Will you come and have a look at 'em? Nothing to pay; so get you in. It's good as a circus to see 'em grin. Come on!"

Hal started at this allusion to the circus, and looked

at the hermit suspiciously, while little Tom clambered down the steps much faster than he had climbed up.

"Time to relieve guard! Dying men's groans, dead men's bones!" cried the hermit as he disappeared in the darkness of the inner cavern.

Much disturbed in mind Hal turned and followed little Tom; and the skeleton, still swaying from the hand-shake with which the hermit had greeted it, seemed to grin and gibe at him as he passed. Tom was already far ahead, and as Hal ran after him the voice of the hermit rang in his ears—"Dying men's groans! dead men's bones!"

Little did he guess under what terrible circumstances he was next to visit Dead-man's Cave.

CHAPTER X.

"WHITE BOY, INJUN—ALL ONE BROTHER."

ON reaching the beach the boys found the tide rapidly filling the creek; indeed, had they longer delayed their departure from the cave, they must have been made prisoners for some hours.

As Hal stooped to raise the basket he thought he heard a faint cry. He listened and heard it again, as did also Tom.

"Tain't a gull," said Tom, "though I thort at first as it was. 'Pears to come from down yonder 'mong the rocks b'low them cliffs."

"Yes; and it's a man's voice too," said Hal. "Sounds like someone shouting for help."

"I'm as hungry as b'ars, I am," replied Tom; "but jest le's run down the beach a bit an' hev a look. The clams will keep, so they will."

They leapt the creek, for the tide had now reached the mouth of Dead-man's Cave, and ran at a smart trot along the rapidly narrowing strip of sand between the water and the cliff. The cry was several times repeated as they proceeded, and on reaching the rocky

bit indicated by Tom they paused to listen. So near did the cry now sound as to make them start with apprehension, for not a living thing was to be seen on all the beach.

Guided by the sound, they made their way to where some loose blocks of stone lay within a few yards of the cliff. The outermost of these was already lapped by the waves, and Hal was about to pass it by when he spied a human figure lying beside it, half in the water, and vainly struggling to free itself from the weight of the rock.

Calling Tom to his assistance, Hal laid hold of the great block, and with some difficulty they succeeded in rolling it over. They were just in time, for, weighed down as the stranger was, the tide would certainly have covered him in a few moments.

No sooner were his legs released from the grip of the stone than he struggled to his feet.

"Why, it's a Injun!" cried Tom in a tone of mingled surprise and contempt.

And an Indian it was—a boy of about Tom's own age. Hal drew back in some alarm at this discovery, for, though he had never before seen an Indian, he had read very terrible things about them.

The stranger uttered a loud whoop of delight at finding himself free and uninjured, and turning to the boys who had rescued him from so terrible a death, said in broken English: "Injun plenty thank-you got

here--here"—thumping his breast very hard—"but tongue no let him out. Injun no speak much English talk; but he bery good friend all same."

"Are you hurt?" asked Hal, overcoming his alarm and glancing anxiously at the bare legs of their dusky friend.

"Injun no hurt; no!" replied the latter, emitting another gleeful whoop and executing a mimic waltz in proof of the assertion. "See," said he, beckoning the boys to the spot where he had lain a prisoner, "big stone fall, little stone hide in sand, save Injun legs."

It was as he said. A buried stone, projecting slightly from the sand, had prevented the larger one from crushing his limbs to a jelly.

"What's your name, Injun?" asked Tom.

"And how came the stone to fall on you?" added Hal.

"Injun name Little Ben. Injun climb down cliff, get gull egg. Injun, big stone, tumble down; big stone get top Injun," replied the son of the forest in broken but graphic language.

"Well, you're all right now, Ben, so we'll leave you," said Hal. "Come, little un, let's go back."

But Ben interposed. "No go back," said he in alarm. "Tide up; wash white boy away. See!" and leaping upon a rock, he pointed in the direction of the cave. The boys mounted each a boulder, and

saw to their dismay that the strip of sand along which they had come was quite submerged. The tide now lapped the very face of the cliff, and, what was worse, the spot where they stood was decreasing in size every moment.

"Oh cricky! them clams 'll be washed away, they will," cried Tom.

"*We*'ll be washed away, you mean," said Hal. "How are we to get out of this, Tom?"

Little Ben answered the question. "Injun show trail," said he. "Tide no climb. Come," and he made for the cliff.

The face of the precipice had here a more gradual slope than that nearer Dead-man's Cave. It was, moreover, torn into deep, irregular gullies by rain torrents from the highlands above. Into one of these channels Little Ben struck, closely followed by his rescuers. The cliff was not of great height, and though the water-course was in places steep and difficult, it yet afforded a by no means insecure footing; and after a breathless climb of some ten minutes they reached the top and threw themselves upon the grass to rest.

"Wigwam yonder; white boy come see," said the Indian lad when they had regained their breath.

The boys followed their guide for some distance through the broken undergrowth with which the high ground was covered. At last they reached a small

clearing sheltered by thick clusters of pine and spruce, in the centre of which stood a conical wigwam of poles and bark. Smoke issued from its top, several dark-skinned, bright-eyed children were playing with a number of dogs about its base, while in the doorway sat a squaw weaving a basket of many-coloured ash-splints. Close by, an Indian lay on the grass idly smoking his pipe.

As the trio approached, the Indian raised his head and regarded them listlessly; the squaw flung a few sharp, quick words at the children as she hastily disappeared within the wigwam, whereat the latter ceased their play and hid behind the nearest clump of bushes.

Little Ben advanced to where the Indian sat, and with voluble tongue and many gestures explained, as the boys guessed, the accident which had befallen him, and the manner of his rescue by the white strangers. The face of the older Indian lighted up, his eyes sparkled, and ere the story was finished he rose and hurried towards the boys, gratitude written on every feature of his not unhandsome countenance.

"Me Ben Christmas," he said by way of introduction as he grasped Hal and Tom warmly by the hand. "Poor Injun no money got, only one little wigwam; but heart mighty big. White boy save little Injun life. Then white boy, Injun—all one brother! Injun much glad. He white boy's friend till he die!"

Saying this, Ben Christmas spread a mat on the ground, and begged them to be seated.

"Injun t'ree girls got," he said, "but one boy only. Girls no good; they only squaw—ugh! Boy-Injun making big warrior. He spear fish, shoot bear, track moose; he plenty good. White boy save Injun boy—me mighty glad. What you take?"

With that he dived into the wigwam, and a moment later returned bearing a black bottle. This he held up to the light in order to ascertain the amount of hospitality it might be expected to afford, and, discovering to his chagrin that the bottle was empty, slowly turned it mouth downwards with a grunt of disappointment.

The boys laughed, and Ben Christmas laughed too as he observed: "Ugh! Cork gone, fire-water all spill."

Once more he disappeared within the wigwam, to return this time with two fresh corn-cob pipes and some tobacco.

"You smoke? you chew?" he inquired eagerly. "Good pipe, good 'baccy; white brother try little."

Hal thanked him and explained that neither he nor Tom used tobacco. At this the Indian's face fell again, and for some seconds he seemed to be puzzling his brain how best to repay the service the boys had rendered him. Suddenly his face brightened, and calling loudly to his squaw he addressed her in a few

rapid words. The squaw re-entered the wigwam with alacrity, and soon there proceeded from within the sounds of batter-mixing and cake-frying, and when she reappeared it was with a wooden tray heaped with smoking-hot griddle cakes.

These Ben Christmas placed before the boys with the remark: "No fire-water, no smoke, but plenty pan-cake got. White brother eat; make Injun plenty glad."

As the boys had not broken their fast since morning, they gladly enough accepted this invitation, and speedily cleared the platter, much to the delight of the Indian boy and his father, who stood by and watched the disappearance of the hot cakes with evident satisfaction.

"White brother save Injun life, eat Injun food. Injun no two-face; he good friend," said Ben Christmas when they had finished; and beckoning Hal to follow, he entered the wigwam.

"Can my white brother read?" he asked when they were inside.

"Yes," said Hal, wondering what was coming next.

With mystery in his every movement the Indian opened a rough deal box and drew from it a much-rusted tin cylinder, such as sailors use for the preservation of their papers.

"Ben Christmas here big secret got," he whispered, as though fearful the very walls of the wigwam

might overhear his words; "but white boy, Injun—all one brother; so Injun telling white boy."

With these mysterious words he removed the cap of the case and drew from it a small roll, which he placed in Hal's hands, who, being very much amazed, held it helplessly and stared at the Indian with open mouth.

"What am I to do with this?" he asked.

"Open," said the Indian.

The roll, when spread on Hal's knee, proved to be a sheet of parchment, yellow and water-stained. On it there were several lines of writing in an old-fashioned, crabbed hand.

"Read," said the Indian.

The letters and words had an unfamiliar look, and it was only after much puzzling and many long pauses that Hal made out the following:

"Hear lyeth Treasure Hyde bye ye famous Captayne Kydd.
Ye Stronge Cheste contayneth—

"Item—30 score Dubloones of Spayne.

"Item—1 Barr of Goold moste precyous.

"Item—2 ditto of Coyne Sylvre."

As Hal slowly spelled out these words, Ben Christmas evinced his satisfaction by many vigorous nods and grunts. But it was some time before Hal took in the full meaning of the time-stained record. When at last it dawned upon him he stared at Ben Christmas incredulously.

"It isn't true, is it?" he exclaimed.

"Ugh! all true," replied the Indian; "that no pale-face lie."

"But how did you know what was written on the paper?"

"Injun read," said Ben Christmas. And taking the paper he read what was written upon it with considerably more fluency than Hal had shown. "Me Ben Christmas," he said, laughing, with an air of conscious pride. "You never hear 'bout Ben? Priest he come, make Ben Christian man, teach him read, teach him write. See!" and thrusting his hand into the box he produced a Bible and several other books.

"But," continued Ben with a solemn shake of the head, "Injun no good. He no like books, he no like God—he like fire-water. Me learn pray, then devil come and say: 'Ben, you fool Injun! what for you want books in wigwam? You got squaw, you got fire-water—you happy.' So Injun go bad again."

"And where did you find this?" asked Hal, pointing to the parchment.

"Injun know," said Ben with a shake of the head. "To-morrow showing white boy place."

"You'll show me the place where the chest is hid!" cried Hal, his imagination all on fire at the thought. "Why, I've no right!"

"Ugh!" grunted Ben; "plenty right got. You save Injun boy's life. White boy, Injun—all one

brother now, so me show where chest hid. Injun got no fire-water to give, you no smoke, you eat little only. How Injun show he plenty glad? He give white brother chest."

"You *are* a good fellow, Ben!" cried Hal heartily.

Ben laughed. "No, me no good," he said. "Me get fire-water inside, then me good—bery!"

"Why not go to the place to-day?" Hal asked, his mind still running on the chest.

"Long way," replied Ben with a wide sweep of his hand; "to-morrow early, Injun come block-house."

"Block-house! Did you know we were stopping at the block-house?"

"Injun got long eye," replied Ben laughing. Then he suddenly added, "You no trust old King Cole. He no crazy, he bad, bad!"

"The old fellow seems harmless enough," said Hal; "why shouldn't I trust him?"

"Injun know," said Ben earnestly; "he bad, like fire-water. You say to fire-water, 'Me no want you, you get out!' then fire-water doing no harm. But you shake hands with him, drink him up; pretty soon fire-water kick up devil inside, make drunk, do big harm. Bad, bad!"

"Do you mean that's the way old King Cole does?" asked Hal anxiously.

Ben nodded. "Old King Cole one big cuss," said he; "you trust him, he do you plenty harm."

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAND UNDER THE BLOCK-HOUSE DOOR.

IT had grown quite dark ere the boys left the wigwam of their Indian friend, and as they passed the abode of the hermit, near which their path ran, they were surprised to see someone swinging a lighted lantern to and fro on the hill-side, immediately above the hut.

"What's ol' King Cole doin', I wonder?" said Tom.

"Signalling some vessel in the bay, I should say; but it don't concern us, so let's get on," replied Hal without stopping.

When they reached the block-house Tom lighted a pine-knot which little Ben had given them on their departure from the wigwam.

"Now, Tom, this way till I make the door fast," said Hal. "There!" he cried proudly as the stout new bar slid into its place, "I rather think that's safe."

"Safe as rocks," assented Tom; "couldn't git that open nohow, so they couldn't."

Then they stretched themselves upon their bed of

fragrant cedar boughs, and soon were wrapped in the peaceful, dreamless slumber of youth.

That night a boat with muffled oars glided into the entrance of Dead-man's Cave on the flood-tide. In it there sat two men, who uttered no word until the bow touched the ledge of rock, peering over the edge of which, had it been daylight, might have been seen the grim visage of the skeleton bell-ringer. Then one of them called out:

"Cole! King Cole, you crazy lunytic, air you thar?"

"Ay, ay, captain!" replied the voice of the hermit from the darkness; "here, keeping Old Bones company."

At the same moment the light of a lantern was turned upon the boat and its occupants, who were none other than the captain of the *Nancy Lee* and his mate, Bill Hoggins. The two men at once sprang out upon the ledge, and King Cole lost no time in leading the way into the inner cavern.

"All safe, Cole?" asked the captain, bestowing a curse in the same breath upon the skeleton, which seemed to grin a more ghastly grin in reply.

"Ay, all safe here and at the block-house, captain," replied the hermit. "The young dogs managed somehow to smell out this hole this morning; but between myself and our silent comrade yonder we frightened 'em away, or like as not they'd have seen more'n they did."

The captain swore a terrible oath. "They knowed enough afore, an' it's a leetle *too* much, this is—hey, Bill?"

"Cap'n," said Bill with great deliberateness, "this 'ere settles the hul bisness. They've slipped their cables an' left us in the lurch onct a'ready; but if they doesn't walk the plank afore this watch's over may I never set teeth to salt junk agin!"

"Ay, ay!" responded the captain. "Cole, is the young uns alone in the blockus?"

"All alone, captain," replied the hermit with a chuckle; "not a living soul within half a mile."

"An' the door?"

"Is fixed with a rotten pole. A hard kick will knock it to smithereens."

By this time the three had traversed the cave, and ascending a number of steps roughly cut in the rock, entered the hermit's hut by that mysterious door which seemed to open directly into the hill.

The hermit set the lantern on the table and produced some liquor. To this the captain helped himself freely, then passed the bottle to the mate and said: "Now, Bill, wot's the course that's to be steered? When smugglin's to be done I'm cap'n; but scuttle my schooner! when it comes to killin' I'm a reg'lar lan'-lubber an' han's the ship over to you."

"I'm for steerin' a straight course to the blockus an' payin' off it's crew 'twonct," was the mate's reply.

"But how about the remains?" objected the captain. "Might be a bit ticklish to hev *them* diskivered, Bill."

"Ay," said Bill; "I hadn't thort o' that. Wot's *your* idee, cap'n?"

The captain addressed himself first to the bottle, then to the mate. "I perposes that the young uns be took aboard the *Nancy Lee*. Salt water's a powerful wash-out fer stains, Bill; an' thar's a goodish dep' o' water out yonder where the schooner's layin'."

"I'm agreeable, cap'n," assented the mate; "the port's all the same, whatsumever course you steers."

"On'y we don't want to be sighted while we runs fer it—hey, Bill?" laughed the captain harshly.

The mate nodded, and after emptying the bottle the three left the hut.

It was perhaps three o'clock in the morning when Hal and Tom were startled by a thunderous knocking at the block-house door.

"Oh my eye!" cried little Tom, rubbing that member fiercely with his fist; "it's the spurts!"

"Who's there?" cried Hal, sitting up and trying to feel very brave.

"It's me," replied a voice which he immediately recognized as that of the mate of the *Nancy Lee*; "it's me, lads. Let a shipmite in, won't yer?"

"What do you want?" demanded Hal, not at all disposed to open the door to so suspicious a visitor.

"The schooner's anchored in the bay, an' I've brought that box of yourn ashore. You forgot it t'other night, I reckon. Unbatten yer hatches, young un, an' I'll clap it inter the hol'," replied the mate, thumping at the door with his fist.

"If you've brought my box," said Hal, who wisely doubted both this statement and the mate's good faith, "leave it outside. There's no one about, and no harm 'll come to it till morning. Who's that with you?"

"No un, 'pon my davie!" replied the mate. But a suspicious shuffling of feet tended rather to discredit this assertion; and muttering a curse upon the carelessness of his companions, the mate raised his voice in order to drown the noise as he added: "There's Injuns in the offin', an' they'll be sartin to take the box in tow afore mornin' if I leaves it here. Come, open to a friend, won't yer?"

"I sha'n't open the door to-night, so you may as well be off about your business, you and them with you," replied Hal boldly, his suspicions more than confirmed by the whispering and shuffling of feet without.

At this the mate threw his whole weight upon the door, aided by the captain, who cried: "That's your little game, is it, my young cock? Scuttle my schooner! but we'll larn you to be more civil-spoken to your betters."

"Run that purty head of yourn agin it, Mr. Mate!"

shouted Tom derisively as the smugglers threw themselves upon the door with a crash.

To this sally there was no reply, save an ominous silence of several minutes.

"Light the nine knot," whispered Hal, seizing the hatchet; "there's no knowing what they'll do next."

Tom quickly lighted the knot, and with Hal awaited events. The whispering was succeeded by a scratching noise, as of someone passing his fingers over the door, and they heard the mate say: "All right, cap'n; the thing's easy as breathin'. Come on!"

Steps approached; there was more whispering, and then Hal gave a great start, for, thrust under the door and gripping it firmly, he saw the fingers of a man's hand.

Instantly the import of this new manœuvre flashed upon him. The door was so hung upon rough iron hinges that it might easily be lifted off. This the villains knew, and were about to take advantage of. The bar, which resisted pressure from without firmly enough, was no protection against such a mode of attack as this.

One bound brought Hal to the door, hatchet in hand. "I've got an axe!" he shouted. "Look out, or I'll chop your fingers off!"

The only reply was a brutal laugh and the appearance of another hand.

Tom ran up with the blazing torch, and Hal raised

the hatchet, intending to strike with its head; but in the excitement of the moment he reversed the weapon, and the keen blade descended with all the force of his right arm upon the nearest row of grimy fingers.

Tom started back with an exclamation of alarm, a fierce roar of pain was heard on the other side of the door, and to his horror Hal saw that the hatchet was dripping blood, while three of the four fingers at which he had struck lay at his feet. Sickened by the sight, he dropped the hatchet and staggered to the bunk.

"I didn't mean to do it, Tom," he groaned; "indeed I didn't! I only meant to strike with the back to make 'em let go."

"Never you mind," said Tom consolingly; "sarves 'em right, it des, for tryin' to break in. 'Sides, like as not they'd 'a' killed us if they'd got the door down. Guess they'll let us be, now, so they will," he added as the footsteps of the attacking party grew fainter and fainter in the distance.

Ere long unbroken stillness reigned in and around the block-house as before. Tom extinguished the torch, and creeping into the bunk was soon asleep again. But Hal lay long awake. Wherever he turned his eyes he saw those awful blood-stained fingers, like fingers of fire, pointing at him from the darkness. Once he thought he heard them groping along the block-house wall. When he dozed at last, they crept

into his dreams and fastened upon his throat with a grip so terrible that he awoke half-choked.

He started up and gazed wildly about, astonished to find the place illuminated by a subdued light, which flickered and danced fantastically on the dark walls. A stifling smell of burning wood filled the room, and on the still night air there floated to his ears a dull crackling roar like the roar of flames. What could it mean?



BEN CHRISTMAS BURSTS INTO THE BURNING BLOCKHOUSE

S
b
m
th
a
k
lit
in
in
fac
for
qu

CHAPTER XII.

"BUT D'LIVER US."

SHAKING his companion, Hal leapt from the bunk to find the light streaming in through the crevice beneath the door. He ran to the door and listened.

"What you wake a feller up for? What's the matter?" demanded Tom, sitting up and gazing about the half-lighted block-house with bewildered eyes.

"Matter enough, Tom," cried Hal, rising hastily; "the block-house is on fire!"

"Afire! We must 'a' dropped a spark from the pine-knot," said Tom, tumbling out of bed.

"No; the fire's outside. The smugglers must have lit it when they found they couldn't get in."

"Then I reckon we'd best git out," said Tom, drawing the bar and attempting to open the door.

To their dismay the door would not budge a single inch. It was secured on the outer side!

The boys stood and looked into each other's white faces silently as the terrible import of this discovery forced itself upon them.

"They've done for us this time!" gasped Hal with quivering lips. "We're fastened in, little un."

Little Tom looked around the dimly-lighted log walls, as if hoping to discover some way of escape from the awful death which was slowly approaching. "There ain't a winder in the whole shebang," he said slowly, "an' we'll be roasted alive sure as nuts if we stays here."

"The chimney!" cried Hal with a sudden ring of hope in his voice.

Tom shook his head. "'Tain't no good, the chimbley ain't; but s'posin' we gives it a try."

They hurried towards the rude structure; but as Hal was about to thrust his head into the wide fireplace a shower of sparks and blazing embers fell from above and made him draw it quickly back.

"No use, Tom," he said despondingly; "the roof's all ablaze. Besides, we could never climb the chimney, it's so small."

"Where's the hatchet?" cried Tom. "P'r'aps we kin cut a hole in the door."

Hal seized the hatchet and set to work with a will, but the planks were so hardened with age that the light implement made but little impression upon them, and he soon gave up the attempt in despair.

"'Twould take all night to chop a hole big enough to put your hand through," he groaned; "and, besides, the logs are as dry as chips. Just hear how they snap and burn!"

Hal's words were only too true. The timbers of

the old structure were like tinder, and burned with a fierce readiness. Already the fire had begun to find its way between the logs about the door in thirsty little tongues, which licked the dry wood greedily and grew every moment larger and fiercer. The heat became overpowering, forcing the terrified boys further and further from the door, which they could not open, but still regarded with hopeful eyes, until they reached the rear wall and stood with backs close pressed against the timbers. Little Tom was the first to give way in face of the impending danger.

"Oh!" he moaned, sinking to the floor and sobbing bitterly, "I'm orful sorry I ever left the farm, I am. I'd ruther hev the tickler harf a dozen times a day, or be drowned in the bay, so I would!"

The poor little fellow's lamentation smote sorely upon Hal's heart. "Oh, Tom!" he cried, "this is all my fault. Only for me, you'd never have come. Say you forgive me, little un—say you forgive me!"

"I forgives you, Hal, though 'tain't your fault, so 'tain't. You was good to me, you was, an' I *ain't* sorry I came," said Tom earnestly, checking his sobs and smiling brightly up at his companion.

Kneeling on the hot floor Hal drew the generous-hearted little fellow close to his side, and throwing his arms about him shielded him as best he could from the scorching heat.

"Hal," said Tom presently, "onct I heer'd passon

read from a book in meetin' how some fellers was throwed into a furn'ce an' didn't hev so much's their whiskers singed. An' passon sed, he did, as how 'twas 'cause they arkst God to keep 'em from burnin'. Oh, Hal, don't you think He might he'p us somehow if you arkst Him now?—though," he added despairingly, "I don't see how He kin, I don't."

"You must ask Him too, little un," whispered Hal brokenly, the tears streaming down his cheeks. "Say it after me—'Our Father which art in heaven—'"

"Father wh'art in heaven—" muttered Tom drowsily, for the stifling heat was fast overpowering him.

"Hallowed be—" The voices were drowned for a time in the crash of falling timbers and the fiercer roar of flames as a portion of the roof gave way. But the figures kneeling by the wall did not move, save, perhaps, to creep a little nearer each other; and presently the prayer could be heard again, though fainter and more broken now.

"But deliver us from evil—"

"But d'liver us"— And then little Tom started up with a glad cry of, "Oh, Hal, He's heer'd us, He has! They're a-comin', they're a-comin'!" and fell to the floor insensible.

Hardly had he uttered the words when the block-house door burst open, a man darted in, and beating off the greedy flames with his hands, cried: "White brothers! you here, white brothers!"

Little Tom's clothes were already ablaze from the embers upon which he had fallen; but Hal, summoning all his remaining strength for the effort, lifted him from the floor, and, heedless of the flames that licked his face, staggered forward with his burden into the arms of Ben Christmas.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEATH OF LITTLE TOM.

THE Indian, having seen from his wigwam the lurid glare of the burning block-house, had reached the spot just in time to rescue the boys from what seemed certain death. His gratification at being thus enabled to repay in kind the debt he owed them, and to support substantially the assertion that white boys and Indian were "all one brother," was deep and genuine, as the frequency and volume of his grunts plainly showed.

Although the hut of King Cole stood much nearer the scene of the fire than did the wigwam of Ben Christmas, strange to say, the hermit failed to put in an appearance until nothing remained of the block-house but a vast bed of glowing embers.

Once in the open air Hal quickly recovered from the faintness which had overpowered him at the moment of Ben Christmas's timely entrance. But alas for little Tom! So severely burnt as to be oblivious of the deliverance which for him had come too late, he was carried to the farmhouse and tenderly laid in

Mrs. Pratt's "best bed-room," where hour after hour he tossed and moaned, muttering fragments of the Lord's prayer, calling piteously for water, or imploring Farmer Tomson to apply the "tickler" lightly, "'cause his back was sore, it was."

Hour after hour Hal sat by the bedside, his face very wan and sorrowful, doing what he could to relieve the poor little fellow's sufferings, and bitterly regretting that he had ever brought Tom away from the farm. Motherly Mrs. Pratt, in check apron and calico gown, moved noiselessly to and fro, caring for the sick lad as tenderly as though he had been "one of her own," while golden-haired little Millie hovered shyly about, glad to have Hal so near, yet sorry from the very bottom of her tender heart for poor Tom.

Ben Christmas, who had been despatched to the nearest settlement for a doctor, returned about noon. Hal and Millie went to the door at the sound of wheels, and, while the doctor passed on to the room where Tom lay, seated themselves upon the door-step. Ben Christmas, wearied by his long walk, threw himself on the grass close by, and regarded his two companions in silence. Suddenly he started to his feet and approached Millie.

"Where you get that?" he asked eagerly, pointing to a coin which hung from her neck by a bit of pink ribbon.

"That! Oh, old King Cole brought it here the

other day; and ma gave him something for it, I forget how much. He said he picked it up somewhere," replied Millie, removing the coin from her neck and passing it to the Indian.

"Yes," said Mrs. Pratt coming to the door at that moment, "that eedyot of a King Cole fetched it here nigh on a week back, an' I give him five shillin' for it. My man Eben, he says it's gold, so I guess I ain't nothin' out o' pocket. Millie, run an' gether some smartweed for poultices. A goodish lot, child, an' be smart about it. Why, Ben, what's the matter?"

The Indian's countenance was a study as he examined the coin, weighed it carefully in his palm, and lastly bit it with his white, even teeth.

"Missus say King Cole bring this? He any more got?" he asked, handing the coin back to Mrs. Pratt with assumed indifference.

Mrs. Pratt laughed good-naturedly. "You know gold a'most as well's whisky, Ben. I as'd him why didn't he take it to the settlement an' git change, an' he ups an' mumbles suthin' about dead men's bones, the crazy ol' loon! But, lan' sakes! how'd I know if he's any more? You'd bes' ask him yourself, Ben. But there, the doctor wants me," said she, breaking off abruptly and hurrying away.

No sooner were they alone than Ben Christmas drew Hal aside. "You see that money?" he asked, throwing a quick glance around to make sure there was no one

within earshot; "that money, money in chest, all same gold!"

Hal looked incredulous. "You must be mistaken, Ben," he said. "You hid the chest, didn't you? How could King Cole have got at it?"

"No mistake," replied Ben in tones of the strongest conviction. King Cole big rascal! How he get! Injun not know, but Injun guess."

"Oh, the chest is all right, Ben," replied Hal. "The hermit must have picked up this gold piece somewhere, as he says. That's nothing wonderful, I've heard, in a country like this."

But Ben was obstinate. "No," he said, "he no pick up, he steal. Sometimes pretty often me find money plenty place—beach, block-house, old well. But pick-up money no like this—" and Ben, after glancing suspiciously about once more, produced from beneath his shirt a dirty cord, to which was fastened another gold coin.

"Why," cried Hal taking it in his hand, "this is just like Millie's!"

"Ugh!" grunted Ben; "Injun no say so? This Injun's luck—he take out chest. Pick-up money all English, French—this Spain gold, same Millie got."

There was no disputing the fact that the two coins were alike in every particular. Even from his casual examination of the one worn by Millie, Hal could see that; while the Indian, who was much better acquainted

with the appearance of the coin than he, was sure of it.

"But how do you suppose King Cole found the chest?" asked Hal.

"Injun not know—only know King Cole big rascal! But me go see," replied Ben; and replacing the coin in his shirt he turned into the road and strode rapidly towards the beach. Half an hour later he might have been seen propelling his canoe swiftly towards a group of small islands which lay some half dozen miles up the coast.

All day long little Tom tossed upon his bed, conscious of nothing save the fierce, racking pain. The doctor remained, and as night approached the grave look upon his face deepened. When Mrs. Pratt asked what he thought of the sick boy, he only shook his head and turned away without speaking.

It wanted half an hour of sunset when Hal, who was sitting upon the door-step, his head sunk despondingly upon his knees, looked up at the sound of an approaching step and saw Ben Christmas standing before him.

"Well, Ben," he asked wearily, "how are they all at the camp?"

"Injun no go wigwam," replied Ben.

"You've not been—"

"Where chest hide? Yes," answered the Indian.

"And the chest?"

"Chest gone," replied Ben laconically; "big hole, no chest—ugh!"

"Then King Cole—" Hal was going on, when Ben interrupted him angrily.

"King Cole big rascal! Bill Hoggins big rascal!"

"Bill Hoggins! the mate of the *Nancy Lee*? What of him, Ben?"

"See," said Ben with a dark scowl as he drew a knife from his belt and handed it to Hal.

The knife was an ordinary sailor's sheath-knife, but without its leathern case, and much rusted, as if from long exposure to the weather. On examining it Hal discovered a name scratched in rude letters upon the wooden handle.

"*'Bill Hoggins, his nife,'*" he slowly spelt out. "Why, Ben, this is the mate's knife! Where in the world did you come across it?"

"Ugh!" grunted Ben Christmas, "Bill Hoggins' knife. Injun go place where chest hide. No chest, only big hole. Then Injun look all round, strike moccasin on something, find knife."

"Near the hole?"

"Ugh! Near hole."

"Then Bill Hoggins must have had a hand in stealing the chest! But how did King Cole get the gold coin?"

"Bill Hoggins, King Cole, all same big rascal!"

cried Ben. "Bill Hoggins watch Injun, he steal chest, King Cole hide. They bad, bad!"

"But I don't see why he should have brought the gold piece here instead of taking it to the settlement," said Hal.

"No go settlement," replied Ben. "There mag'-strate, lock-up, King Cole plenty 'fraid. Fox no stick his head in trap."

At that moment Millie ran up and said hurriedly, "Oh, Hal! please, ma says Tom's woke up and wants you to come."

Hal waited to hear no more, but hurried away. Mrs. Pratt was in the kitchen, and her eyes were very red with weeping. "Goodness, how you started me!" she cried when Hal rushed in. "He's come to his right senses, an's askin' for you, the pore critter! Go right straight in, sonny."

Hal passed through into the "best bed-room" where Mrs. Pratt had laid little Tom. The doctor was there; but Hal did not see him, for Tom's eyes were wide open and fixed eagerly on his face as he approached.

"Are you better, little un?" he whispered in a choked voice as he bent over the bed.

The sick boy passed one arm about Hal's neck with a slow, painful effort. "I'll be a'right purty soon, I will," he murmured. "Th'r' ain't no more pain now, 'cept when I moves." Then a smile lit up

his wan features as he added, "An' He heer'd you, Hal, He did!"

"Who, little un?" asked Hal, not knowing that Tom's thoughts had wandered back to that prayer in the burning block-house, and thence to Him who had heard and answered it.

"Our Father wh'art in heaven," said the sick boy with painful slowness. "*He* heer'd you an' d'livered you, Hal, though He *was* a bit late a-comin'. You was good to me, so you was, an' He knowed it, He did, 'cause He knows everythin', an' He wouldn't let the fire do you no harm. But me—'tain't much diff'r'nce 'bout me, Hal, 'cause I'm on'y a little good-for-nothin'. But He'll make it a'right purty soon, He will."

"Oh, don't say you're going to leave me, little un!" sobbed Hal, struggling in vain to keep back the tears. "The pain's all gone—you said so just now—and you'll be all right again in a day or two, Tom."

A glad, peaceful smile lit up the pale little face, and lifting one hand slowly the sick boy pointed through the window to where the level sunset-light deepened the autumnal glory of the hills and lay in paths of gold upon the placid bay.

"Yes, the pain's all gone," he whispered; "an' it's all quiet, jest like that, an' full o' glory! Kneel down aside me, Hal, an' say it agin—that pray'r what d'livered you from the fire. An' go slow, Hal, so's I

kin foller, for p'r'aps He'll hear me too, though I'm on'y a little good-for-nothin'."

With streaming eyes and choking voice Hal knelt and slowly repeated the prayer that, in the mind of the dying boy, was inseparably connected with deliverance from evil. Fainter and fainter grew the voice of little Tom, as the broken petition and the broken life together neared their end.

"And the power and the glory—" sobbed Hal.

"An' the glory," whispered the dying boy, a light ineffable and not of this world playing upon his features. "It's a-comin' nearer, Hal, it is! There, don't you see it?—the glory! the glory!"

And Hal, looking quickly up, saw through his tears the last rays of the setting sun kiss the face of little Tom and fade into the still, gray shadow of death.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HERMIT HOISTS HIS TRUE COLOURS.

THE death of little Tom weighed heavily upon Hal's spirits for a long time. He felt that in inducing the poor lad to leave his home with Farmer Tomson he had made himself responsible in great measure for his sad end.

He still remained at Mrs. Pratt's, where he made himself so useful that that good woman, whose "man" was away on a sea voyage, was really glad to have him. Mrs. Pratt often wondered whence Hal and little Tom, now lying in the lonely graveyard by the old meeting-house, had come, and what their story was, and why they were so friendless; but, observing the scared look that leapt into Hal's eyes whenever she approached the subject, she shrewdly guessed that he wished to avoid it, and so asked no prying questions. As for Hal, the dread of being discovered, even in this out-of-the-way place, haunted him day and night, and this, coupled with the remorse occasioned by the thought of little Tom's sad fate, rendered him unhappy.

"S'posin'," he would say to himself with a start,

when he caught sight of a stranger or an unknown vehicle in the road—"s'posin' it's the constable coming to take me to jail!"

His visits to the wigwam of Ben Christmas were frequent. But the loss of his "luck" weighed upon the spirits of the Indian, and drove him to seek solace more than ever in that universal panacea for the ills of his race—whisky. The black bottle was nearly always empty now; and an empty bottle meant a drunken Indian. On rare occasions Hal found him sober; not from choice, but because he was without the means of buying "fire-water." At such times Ben would discourse in laconic gutturals on the loss of his treasure, the rascality of the men who had made away with it, and the untrustworthiness of the "pale-face" in general; forgetting in his misfortune the favourite maxim of his happier moments, that "white man and Injun were all one brother."

One day as Hal was wending his way along the leaf-strewn wood-path towards the Indian's wigwam, he took it into his head to visit the old hermit, whom he had seen but seldom since the death of little Tom. So, turning aside, he found the hermit sitting in the door of his hut smoking, and Lord Chancellor on guard.

"Who goes there?" shrieked the parrot as Hal approached; "the countersign, or I fire!"

"Dead men's bones," said Hal, shivering involuntarily as the words passed his lips.

King Cole looked hastily up at the sound, and removing his pipe from his teeth, cried: "Welcome, my noble young friend! The Duke of Kent is dead and John Bull's a-bed, but the world wags on as ever. My palace is at your service. Enter!"

Taking a seat on the door-sill beside the hermit, Hal suddenly resolved to ask him a question.

"King Cole," said he, "Mrs. Pratt showed me a coin that she got from you. Where did you find it?"

King Cole started. "'Tis a lean purse that carries only a brass button," said he; "and though I'm king of the Cannibal Islands, mine is as lean as a sow's ear."

"This was no brass button," persisted Hal, "but a gold coin. Tell me where you found it, King Cole, like a good fellow."

"A brass button—only a brass button," chuckled King Cole, who had now recovered himself. "There's a hundred and ten down among the dead men. That's where I keep my wardrobe."

"Down among the dead men! dead men!" shrieked Lord Chancellor from his perch.

Hal thought he would test the crazy hermit a little. "I should like to see this wardrobe of yours, King Cole," he said. "Where is it?"

"In the palace dungeon," replied Cole, "where I keep my jewels of lead and my robes of red—all but the crown, and that's on John Bull's head."

"In the cave, do you mean?" asked Hal

"In the cave, in the cave, the dead men's grave! Do you want to see it, my noble young friend? Well, you shall, for your name is Hal—bluff King Hal!" And rising, King Cole stuck his pipe in a crack of the wall and proceeded to light a lantern.

Could Hal have known the thoughts which were at that moment uppermost in the mind of King Cole he would have turned and fled from the hut as from the lair of some ferocious wild beast. But, unluckily for him, in his boyish ignorance of human nature he took the hermit for what he pretended to be—a half-witted, harmless old man. He thought, despite all Ben Christmas's assertions to the contrary, that so simple a creature could be in no way concerned in the theft of the treasure-chest. Of King Cole's connection with the smugglers, and his part in the attempt upon his own and little Tom's life, he was totally ignorant.

His one object in wishing to penetrate that section of the cave upon which he and Tom had turned their backs without regret after making the acquaintance of the skeleton bell-ringer, was to ascertain what it contained. The treasure-chest had, perhaps, been secreted there by the mate of the *Nancy Lee*; and if so, what more likely than that the hermit, in the course of his aimless roavings, should have happened upon it and discovered the nature of its contents?

Even when King Cole opened the inner door of the hut, that mysterious door which seemed to lead into

the heart of the hill as into a grave, and bade him follow, Hal did not hesitate. So implicitly did he believe the old man to be "daft," that the fact of his having a secret entrance to the cave aroused in Hal's mind no suspicions whatever.

It was only when King Cole closed the door behind them, and Hal found himself surrounded by darkness, which the hermit's lantern served only to render more appalling, that he felt a strange shrinking from trusting himself alone in the very bowels of the cliff with his eccentric guide.

But even this feeling he set down to his unusual surroundings, and so followed the hermit unquestioningly. In the darkness he did not observe that John Bull was at his heels.

Chuckling and muttering to himself as he led the way, the hermit, on reaching the rough steps descending to the lower cave, turned and said in sepulchral tones: "Look before you leap, for the cave is deep!"

Hal took this to mean that he was to exercise caution in descending the steps; but had he seen the sinister, evil look on the hermit's face, he would, perhaps, have interpreted the words differently.

As they advanced into the cave the hermit held the light in such a way that Hal could see nothing save the wet rock upon which he walked. Presently his guide stopped, and dropping his usual form of address

said: "Stay here a moment. John Bull will keep you company till I come back."

Hal now for the first time observed that the dog accompanied them, and was far from reassured by the angry growl which he uttered in response to his master's words.

The hermit presently returned with a rope in his hand. As he set the lantern down, the light fell on his face, and Hal observed with alarm that it wore an expression such as he had never before seen upon it. When the hermit spoke, too, his tone had undergone so marked a change as almost to render the pointed words he uttered unnecessary.

"Young fellow," said he, confronting Hal with an evil look in his face, "you've all along taken me for a fool; now you'll learn what I really am—a rogue, and a determined un at that. Perhaps it'll make the business shorter to tell you at once that I'm in the pay of the captain of the *Nancy Lee*. Put your hands behind your back and stand still!"

For a moment Hal was too overcome with astonishment to comprehend the wretch's words; but as their full meaning dawned upon him he started back with a cry of terror.

"Stand still, I tell you!" cried the hermit with an oath; "or I'll make John Bull pin you with his teeth!"

The dog bounded forward at mention of his name,

and would have sprung at Hal's throat had not King Cole hastily seized him by the collar.

"Now, move an inch and he'll tear you to tatters!" he muttered with another oath.

"You mean cur!" cried Hal indignantly; "you brought me here to see the cave, pretending to be my friend. What do you mean to do with me?"

"That I'll tell you in mighty few words," the hermit replied, seizing him roughly by the arm. "The captain and Bill Hoggins spotted you as food for fishes long ago. Twice your luck has cheated 'em; but the third time's killin' time, they say, and by Davy Jones, you don't slip through *my* fingers!"

Before Hal could utter a word or offer the slightest resistance, the hermit by a quick dexterous movement threw him face downwards upon the floor of the cave, and drawing his hands tightly behind his back proceeded to lash them to his body with the rope.

Hal shouted and struggled, but all in vain. His sturdy young strength availed nothing against that of the wiry old man, who planted one heavy knee between his shoulders and laughed a wicked laugh as he muttered: "Ay, yell away till doomsday, my hearty! None 'll hear you in this hole but the skeleton yonder. The breath 'll be out of you soon enough, so make the best use of it while it lasts!"

He next proceeded to bind Hal's feet, after which he took him by the collar, lifted him into a sitting

posture, and then dragged bodily to the wall, where he secured the now exhausted and helpless lad to a massive ring-bolt which dangled from the rock. This done, he disappeared a second time in the dark recesses of the cave, followed by the dog.

He was gone some time, and Hal, benumbed with terror though he was, fell to wondering in a dazed sort of way what was to be his fate. Was he to be imprisoned here until the smugglers landed from the schooner and he could be made over to their brutal vengeance? Would he be left to die a lingering death from starvation and thirst, with that horrible skeleton for his only companion? Or would the hermit, that human fiend, return and end it all there and then by a blow of his knife?

While these thoughts were chasing each other in a maddening race through his brain, the hermit returned, carrying something in his arms, which, when deposited on the floor in the light of the lantern, proved to be a small keg.

Without a word, but with that fiendish look still upon his face, the hermit took a marlin-spike which he had brought with him and stove in the head of the keg. Then he thrust his hand in, and taking up a quantity of the contents allowed it to sift slowly through his bony fingers. The keg contained gunpowder!

A terrible presentiment of the nature of the doom

awaiting him now flashed upon Hal, and he watched the hermit's every movement with horrified intentness. He knew what was coming, yet he could no more take his eyes off his executioner than the bird in its death fascination can wrest its gaze from the deadly cobra.

The hermit placed the keg within a few yards of where Hal sat, and producing a tallow dip from his pocket lighted it at the lantern and carefully thrust the butt end deep into the powder. This done, he stood for a moment and surveyed the result of his devilish arrangement with grim satisfaction. Then he raised the lantern from the floor, and without a word, for words were needless, turned away from the spot and disappeared in the darkness.

And Hal, with the cold sweat of horror standing in great beads upon his forehead, sat there powerless to move hand or foot, and watched that candle-flame eat its way down and down towards the powder, slowly, but with all the certainty of death.

CHAPTER XV.

TELLS HOW HAL GOT OUT OF A TIGHT PLACE.

LONG after the last flicker of the hermit's lantern had disappeared, Hal sat staring wide-eyed with terror into the unfathomable darkness of the cavern. But by and by the necessity for making some effort to avert the awful doom which threatened him roused Hal from the state of half stupor into which he had sunk.

He set his teeth hard, and struggled desperately to free himself from the ropes. But the knots, tied by a skilled hand, refused to yield; the cruel cords cut deep into his flesh, the rusty ring behind him gibed harshly at his helplessness. As well try to tear the ring-bolt from the solid rock as to free his limbs from those cruel cords!

"Oh," he moaned, "why didn't he kill me at once and have done with it, the coward!"

The candle, as if aware that it was there to execute the murderous design which the cowardly hermit had feared to complete with his own hand, flared as if in reply, and, as little merciful as he who had constituted

it the messenger of death to a helpless lad, burned fiercely in its eagerness to reach the fatal powder.

"King Cole! King Cole!" shrieked the wretched boy. "Come back, oh, come back and kill me!"

But King Cole, even if he heard, was unmoved by this piteous appeal for a doubtful mercy, and through the dark length of the great cavern there came no answer save the hollow, ghostly echo of that hopeless prayer.

Presently Hal became quiet; for when he called the echoes mocked him like fiends, when he struggled the black air of the place seemed to press upon him like a tremendous weight. So he sat quite still and thought, closing his eyes tightly to shut out that silent tongue of fire which, second by second, ate its relentless way downwards—thought of the green fields, the bright sunlit bay, the wonderful autumnal tints of the forests, and of a hundred other things which had made his life pleasant and well worth living. He was so young, and life was so sweet! Must he die, and by so horrible a means! If he could but die as dear little Tom had died, with the warm sunlight upon his face, it would not be so hard, he thought. But to die here, in this awful black solitude, in this great grave, and with a grim skeleton for his only companion! oh, it was hard, bitter hard!

Then his thoughts wandered back to his early home and to his sweet, gentle mother, as the thoughts of

boys (ay, and of men too) will do in distress and danger; for, though we may forget at times, our mother's love is the one influence that never forsakes us, from the hour we are laid in our first narrow cradle of wood till the last narrow cradle of earth receives us.

And so Hal, with death creeping near and nearer at every heart-beat, thought of his mother. "She's an angel now," he said to himself softly, "and perhaps she'll hear me if I call her, for she must surely be near me now. Mother, dear mother!" he whispered, "you used to be good to me when I was little and played at your knee. And often when I got hurt you would take me in your arms and kiss me, and say you wouldn't ever let anything harm me again. Won't you come to me now, mother dear,—now that I need you so much? Oh, don't leave me here to die all alone in the dark!"

Then his mind began to wander, as he himself had wandered since his mother died and left him alone in the world. He thought he saw Ben Christmas pass, and he shouted until his voice failed under the strain; but the Indian did not hear him, and went on his way unheeding.

Now Bill Hoggins bent over him. Hal could feel the mate's fierce breath on his cheek, and hear him mutter, "Dead men sees no sights they hadn't orter see, an' tells no tales they hadn't orter tell. Same with dead boys." Then cold fingers gripped his throat:

he struggled, and the fingers lay at his feet all red with blood!

Again, it was the old block-house, and that terrible half-hour in the fire with little Tom kneeling by his side; and he heard Tom say, "Tetch him up agin behind, Hal!" He saw the grim skeleton dangling by one bony hand from the bell-rope, heard the bell toll a hollow, death-like knell, and knew that the knell was for himself.

He was conscious of making one last, frantic effort to free his limbs from the grip of the rope, of seeing the tongue of fire hopelessly near the black powder, of uttering a despairing cry for help; then all became blank.

He never knew how long he lay in this condition, though he guessed afterwards that the time must have been very short. That terrible moment of return to the reality of his position seemed ever after like an awful nightmare, the details of which he could never fully recall. The appalling darkness of the cave, the sinister glow of the candle, the agonizing eating into his flesh of the cruel rope, the dreadful end which made each second of his imprisonment seem an immeasurable age—all were in an instant's time stricken from his memory by a lightning flash of hope.

For a voice, a timid, frightened voice, was calling to him from the darkness as in a dream.

"Hal! dear Hal! are you there?" it said.

In his joy he thought it was his mother calling him, and struggling with his bonds cried out feebly: "Here, mother, here! Help me, quick!"

"Oh, Hal, Hal! where are you? I can't find you in the dark!" the voice answered; and then Hal knew that it was Millie Pratt, who called, and that he was saved.

"Here! This way, Millie!" he shouted with all his strength; and in a few moments Millie, trembling and panting, knelt by his side.

"Oh, Hal," sobbed the girl, "what's the matter? Why don't you get up? Are you hurt?"

Hal's joy was so great that he could hardly speak. But it was necessary to control himself until he told Millie what to do.

"Millie, brave little friend!" he gasped; "you see that light just there? It's a burning candle set in a keg of gunpowder. Go to the keg and lift it out carefully. And be quick, Millie, or it'll be too late!"

Scarcely comprehending his words, or knowing what she did, the brave girl approached the keg, and, at the imminent peril of her life, drew the stump of the candle from the powder. Only when it was past did she realize the nature of the awful danger which had threatened Hal's life; and creeping back to his side she flung her arms about his neck and wept for very joy.

"My feet and hands are tied, Millie," said the lad after a little; "the old hermit did it. Put your hand in my coat pocket. You'll find my knife there. Open it and cut the ropes."

With trembling fingers Millie obeyed, and in a few moments Hal struggled to his feet, very cramped and sore, but free.

The first thing he did was to take Millie in his arms and kiss her again and again, with streaming eyes and lips that could scarce falter the gratitude with which his heart swelled almost to bursting.

"Tain't nothing, what I did," sobbed Millie, clinging to him half in fear of the dark, half in joy that he was safe. "Tain't nothing, dear Hal; only I'm so glad!"

"Now," said Hal, "let's get out of this. But first I'll put the candle back in the powder, so that the powder will blow up as old King Cole meant it to, for he musn't know that I've escaped. At least, not just yet."

Taking up the candle, which Millie had placed on the ground, he first snuffed it, then replaced it carefully in the powder; after which he took Millie by the hand and led her silently and swiftly from the cave.

The girl shuddered and covered her eyes as they passed the skeleton bell-ringer. "Oh, ain't it just awful, Hal!" she cried; "I don't know how I ever got past

it. But I heard you callin', and just shut my eyes and ran by without looking."

Once in the open air, they sat down upon a rock near the cave's mouth, and Hal, still holding Millie's hand tightly, asked her how she had found him.

Millie smiled on him with eyes still wet with tears, as she replied: "I don't quite know, Hal, how it happened; only dinner was getting cold, and you didn't come, and ma she says to me, 'Millie, wherever can that boy be gone to? Just run and see, that's a good girl!' And I was thinking about you myself, Hal; so I just ups and runs down the road, thinking p'raps you'd gone to the shore for chips. And when I got there I couldn't see you, but I seen tracks in the sand, and I thought they might be yourn; so I runs along the beach till I comes to the cave, and then something seemed to whisper, 'He's in there;' and I went in, and heard you callin', and—and—oh, Hal, I'm *so* glad!"

Then Millie cried again; and somehow, as he sat there on the rock and looked with misty eyes at the sweet, tear-wet face, Hal's heart went out to Millie as it had gone out to little Tom, "only different," and from that day he made up his mind what he should do when he and Millie were "grown up."

Then occurred an interruption which caused them both to start and turn very white, as they looked into one another's faces. First there came a dull, thunderous roar, deep down in the earth, as it seemed;

then they felt the rock upon which they sat quake as if with fright. A few moments later there rolled from the mouth of Dead-man's Cave a cloud of thick, bluish smoke.

"King Cole will think I'm there," said Hal with a queer little laugh. But the next moment he became very grave indeed, and they rose and returned to the house without another word.

When Mrs. Pratt was told what had happened, she kissed both Millie and Hal very tenderly and left the room. When she returned her eyes were red, and there were a number of wet spots on her apron.

CHAPTER XVI

HAL PAYS A VISIT TO THE "SQUIRE."

HAL had a long conversation with Mrs. Pratt that evening, when it was decided that he should proceed to the "settlement" on the following day and make a plain statement of the villainy of the smuggler crew to the village magistrate.

Ben Christmas was easily induced to bear him company, for a visit to the "settlement" contained possibilities in the way of "fire-water," to which the Indian was fully alive.

At an early hour of the morning they set out. The day was one of those perfect days of the Canadian Indian-summer, when to be in the open air with the still, bright sky above and the many-hued pageant of the autumn trees about you, seems to lift one to the very summit of content.

Arrived at the settlement, the Indian led Hal straight to the office of the magistrate, where he left him and went off in quest of his favourite stimulant.

The office of "Squire" Purdy was nothing more nor less than the village "store," where anything might be bought, from a paper of pins to a barrel of flour; for the "squire" dealt out sugar as well as justice, and

applied the law at the same counter where he plied his yard-stick.

The only occupant of the store when Hal entered was a mackerel-faced boy of about his own age, who was perched on a barrel facing the door, industriously stuffing himself with dried dulse—an occupation which he continued without noticing the new-comer. At last Hal ventured to address him.

"Is this Squire Purdy's shop?"

The mackerel-faced boy gulped down a huge wad of the sea-weed, stared very hard at the new-comer for some moments, and replied severely:

"This air the *office* of Square Purdy, jestice of the peace, young feller. Likewise his store. What might you be wantin'? Suggar, calerco, terbacker, 'lasses? We kin s'pply you anythin' in the groc'ry or wimmin-goods line, from a carpet-tack to a stay-lace; cash on the nail, or tick on 'proved s'curity."

"I only want to see Squire Purdy," explained Hal.

The mackerel-faced boy nodded. "I see," said he. "Wanter trade, I s'pose. From the back settlements—no cash. What you got? Buckwheat, shingles, butter, taller cannels, no matter what, we buys 'em all, an' gives you extray valure in goods of any kin'."

"No," said Hal laughing, "I don't want to trade either. I've come to see the Squire on business."

"Might it be lor biz, now?" queried the boy eagerly.

Hal assured him it was nothing more nor less than law business.

At this the mackerel-faced boy opened his eyes very

wide and stared at Hal with a sort of awe. Then, as if realizing the importance of his visitor, he jumped from the barrel and invited him to be seated.

"Y' see," said he, "it's rayther airy for the Square to be down, jest yet. He's my dad, the Square is. I allus opens store afore the old man comes. But he'll be down purty soon, I reckon. Hev some dulse? No? Wal, there's no 'countin' for tastes. I likes it myself, dulse; it keeps a feller's jaws busy an' his vest tight till meal-time. What might be your biz with the Square, now?"

Before Hal had time to evade this blunt question the clatter of hoofs was heard at the door, and the mackerel-faced boy exclaimed, "Thar's the ol' man now!"

"Joe, Joe!" called a wheezy voice from without; "come an' hitch the mare, Joe!"

Joe rapidly stuffed a couple of huge handfuls of dulse into his trousers' pockets, for he wore no jacket, and ran to the door, followed by Hal.

"You are mos' oncommon slow this mornin', Joe," remarked the Squire severely as he made over the mare to his son. "At that dulse agin, I kalkilate."

"No, dad, no!" said the shameless Joe; "hain't tetched it this mornin', 'pon my—"

"Don't swar," said the Squire severely, "but hitch the nag an' keep your jaw shet. If I didn't know you for a mos' oncommon trewthful young man I'd ask you what it is as gives your pockets sech a bulge."

While this little conversation was going on Hal had been observing the Squire, who now hopped into the

"store" with only a passing glance at the stranger. I say "hopped," for one of Squire Purdy's legs was considerably longer than its fellow. To lengthen the short leg he wore a very high heel, and from this circumstance the settlers had good-naturedly nicknamed him "Bildad the *Shuhite*!"

The Squire never wore a coat except on Sundays when he "went to meeting," and during assize week when he attended county court. His trousers and vest were of the coarsest gray homespun, his shirt of home-made linen. Being unable to take much exercise, the Squire had grown stout, and as he had a fancy for wearing his waistcoat short and his trousers without suspenders, there was always visible between his upper and nether garments a gap, through which showed a broad zone of white shirt, called by the neighbours his "lucid interval."

The mare was as great a curiosity as her master. Like him, she was lame and short of wind; unlike him, she was extremely thin, so thin indeed that her sharp backbone threatened to cleave both saddle and rider in twain. This extraordinary leanness was easily accounted for. The Squire's lame leg and portly person prevented him from walking any save the shortest distances, and so the mare was kept all day long "hitched" to a post before the office ready for use. Here the unhappy beast's only food consisted of such splinters and bits of wood as were gnawable from the hitching-post, and as this post-meat contained scant nourishment the lame mare grew leaner and lighter as her lame master grew fatter and heavier.

"Dad," said the mackerel-faced Joe, thrusting his head in at the door with a gulp suspiciously indicative of dulse—"dad, this young feller ses he's come on lor biz."

"Law business, hey?" demanded the Squire as Hal re-entered the shop. "Can't sell you anything, then? Don't want no presarvin' sugar, I s'pose? Nor no fall goods for the wimmin folk?"

Hal shook his head and proceeded to explain his errand. He wished to bring a charge of attempted murder, he said, against the captain and mate of the schooner *Nancy Lee*, whom he believed to be smugglers, and also against one King Cole.

The Squire stared at Hal, and comprehending the importance of the case, rubbed his hands and spat tobacco juice in high good-humour.

"As a jestice of the peace," he said pompously, "it's my dooty to inform you, young man, thet the charge you air about to make air not an or'nary charge. It's a mighty 'sponsible perdickement, a criminal charge; an' you bes' consider car'fully afore you declar' anything kalkilated to swing a feller-critter off the gallus into kingdom come."

"I know that already, sir," said Hal. "Mrs. Pratt and me talked it over last night, and she says I mustn't keep still any longer or my life won't be worth having; so I've walked all the way from the Cape to tell you about it, Squire Purdy."

"An' you hev come to the right pusson, young man," the Squire made answer, inwardly well pleased with Hal's respectful manner. "A statement's what

you want—a statement dooly drawed up an' swore to. The fee is a shillin'. Hev you got the cash?"

Mrs. Pratt's foresight had provided against this emergency, and Hal laid a shilling on the counter, while the Squire, after pocketing the fee, called for paper and ink and proceeded to take down his deposition.

Hal related how he and little Tom had boarded the schooner, how he had overheard the plot between the captain and the mate, and how he and his companion had escaped. Then he described the attack upon the block-house, the incident of the fire, and the sad death of little Tom. Here all his efforts failed to keep the tears back, and he quite broke down.

"This air a solemn occasion," wheezed the Squire, gravely looking from Hal to Joe and emphasizing each sentence with a squirt of tobacco juice. "This air a solemn occasion, an' I feel it born in me to obsarve, in the words of the prophet Zeekal, that thar air neether sunshine nor jie, young man, for the boy that stubbs his toe a-trampin' the road of life. But cheer up an' let's get the disposition writ."

So Hal told the rest of his story, and at last, after a long struggle on the part of the Squire with a bad pen and worse spelling, the statement was ready.

"Wal," he remarked, heaving a sigh of relief as he sanded the inky sheet of foolscap profusely, "every path hev its puddle; but durn me if yourn don't seem to be chock full of 'em, young man!" And having delivered himself of this opinion, he hitched up his trousers well over his "lucid interval," and refreshed himself with a quid of tobacco.

"Now," resumed the Squire, "you hev got to swar to't. You understan' the nater of an oath, I guess?"

Hal said he thought he did, and the Squire turned to his son. "Joe, fetch thet Bible."

Joe rummaged under the counter and on the shelves, but no Bible was forthcoming, and at last the Squire lost all patience.

"Never min'," he shouted; "the almanik 'll hev to do. Thar ain't no Scriptor in a almanik, but thar's a mighty lot o' weather; so't 'mounts to purty nigh the same thing, I reckon, bein' as both Scriptor *an'* weather air gifts o' the Lord."

When all was done, Squire Purdy said briskly: "Now, young man, you stay right here until I git back. If you don't let that tongue of yourn wag, we'll hev the constables here an' them smugglers in the grab o' the law in less'n no time. Joe, don't you touch thet dulse!"

"No, dad," said Joe; "I never des—'cep'," he added with a wink at Hal as the Squire hobbled from the shop—"cep' when the ol' man's outer the way. Sez he t'other day, 'Joe,' sez he, 'you hev sold a powerful heap o' dulse this while back; the barr'l's a'most emp'y,' he sez; an' me so chock up with dulse that I dassn't laugh fear he'd see't stickin' in my throat—he, he, he!"

In an hour's time the squire again ambled up to the shop on his scraggy steed, followed by four men, two of whom were unofficial-looking country constables. The others were revenue men; for the settlement lay on the bay shore, and as its trade was considerable, a

small revenue cutter was stationed here to prevent smuggling.

The necessary warrants were soon made out, and Hal accompanied the men on board; Ben Christmas, who had got outside more "fire-water" than he could well carry, being left behind. As soon as the tide permitted, the cutter was got under way for the Cape, where she was laid to about dusk under a small island. Hal and the men went on shore without delay.

Half an hour later, as King Cole sat smoking in the door of his hut, he received an unpleasant surprise. Looking up at the sound of a light footfall on the turf, he was horrified to see standing before him the boy whom he believed to have been killed by the explosion in the cave. The hermit, as we have seen, was a coward, and the appearance of the murdered lad's ghost gave him such a fright that the pipe fell from his nerveless hand as he sat staring wildly at the apparition.

"Wh—wh—what do you want?" gasped King Cole when able to speak.

"You," replied Hal in his most sepulchral tones.

"Wh—what for?" stammered the hermit.

"Dead men's bones!" was the awesome reply.

"Oh Lor'!" cried the conscience-stricken wretch; and unable longer to face this visitor from another world, as he believed Hal to be, he started up and made for the bushes, only to run full tilt into the arms of the officers, who lost no time in depositing him in the cutter's hold, securely bound.

The smugglers had not been seen in the vicinity

since the burning of the block-house; and as no information could be extracted from the sullen prisoner as to when they were likely to return, the officers decided to pass the night in the cave, hoping that the captain and mate of the *Nancy Lee* might land before morning and be induced by force of numbers to join the hermit in his solitary quarters.

They were returning to the hut with this object in view when an event occurred which raised their expectations to the highest pitch.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SMUGGLERS LAND THEIR LAST CARGO.

THEY had reached the clearing before the hut, when Hal, who led the way, suddenly exclaimed: "Hello! look at that light."

The officers stopped and stood gazing over the bay, which stretched away dark and indistinct into the night. In a few moments the light flashed out again.

"Signals," observed one of the officers. "Wonder what they mean?"

"The smugglers on the *Nancy Lee*," cried Hal eagerly, "signalling to King Cole. I've seen them at it once before—the night the block-house was burnt."

"They're pretty sure to come ashore to-night, then," observed the officer in charge. "Lucky for us—hey, mates?"

But Hal interrupted him. "They won't venture ashore," he said, "unless they think everything is safe. Look, there's the light again! They're expecting King Cole to signal back."

The officer laughed. "That he won't do; and the sulky old dog's not likely to tell us how to do it for him."

"I can manage that, I think," said Hal. "Give me the lantern, and stay here till I come back."

Climbing the hill above the hut he waved the light to and fro as he had seen the hermit do. The signal was immediately answered by a similar one from the bay.

"That looks promising," said the officer, as Hal rejoined the group. "I suppose we may prepare to welcome them at once?"

"If they land in the cave they'll be along at high-water," replied Hal; and in a few words he explained how the character of the creek rendered this necessary.

The officer consulted his watch by the light of the lantern. "It ought to be high-water about nine o'clock," said he, "and it is now nearly eight. We have barely time to make our arrangements. Take the light, boy, and lead the way to the cave. Come on, men!"

Hal seized the lantern and conducted the party into the cavern by the secret entrance through which the hermit had led him only the day before. On reaching the spot where he had passed that terrible period face to face with death, he stopped and pointed to the ring-bolt and rope dangling from the powder-blackened wall.

The officers examined the spot curiously. "Jupiter!" exclaimed one, "you had a narrow escape that time, my boy!"

With a shudder more expressive than words, Hal moved on towards the creek. At sight of the skeleton, which, being at a considerable distance from the scene

of the explosion, had survived the shock, his companions uttered a simultaneous exclamation of horror. Time, however, was too precious to allow them to indulge their curiosity, and after a hasty examination of the ghastly object the leader decided upon his course of action.

"You there," he said to his men, "hide yourselves behind that projecting shoulder of rock. Lie close to the wall, especially if the smugglers show a light; and when I sound my whistle, throw yourselves on them and overpower them. Let it be done quickly, and without bloodshed, if possible. Better look to your pistols, though, in case they should be needed. I shall stand behind the skeleton here, and as soon as they pass I will give the signal and attack them in the rear."

"What am I to do?" asked Hal, eager to have a hand in the capture.

"You'd only be in the way in the tussle," replied the officer coolly, "and you may get hurt if we have to use our shooting-irons." After reflecting a moment he added: "But there is something you can do, I guess. The smugglers will land by those steps, you say?"

"There's no other place they can land if they come in here," replied Hal, not too well pleased by the officer's estimate of his worth in the coming encounter.

"Then I'll tell you what you might do. Crawl out on that ledge alongside the creek, and when the men step ashore and we tackle 'em, drop into the boat and push her off. They're not likely to leave anyone to mind her in such a sheltered place as this, and if you

play your part in our little game well, they'll be trapped sure as death!"

Hal obeyed with alacrity; for he saw that the part assigned him, even if not a very dangerous one, might have no small bearing on the issue of the undertaking. In a few moments he had crept as far as he could safely go along the projecting ledge of rock.

"Lie low!" cried the officer after him, "and be as mum as a mouse, or the fat will be in the fire! Now then, men, hold yourselves together for a dash when you hear me whistle, and look out for their villainous knives!"

Everything being now in readiness, the officer concealed himself behind the skeleton and screened the light. Absolute darkness and silence, intensified rather than broken by the scarce audible lap-lapping of the incoming tide, filled the cavern.

To Hal, lying at full length upon the damp rock, the time seemed long, but neither so long nor so lonely as on the previous day, when he thought each moment would be his last on earth. He knew that from his position he would probably be the first to detect the approach of the boat, if indeed it came at all. But that it would come he felt sure; and as the tide crept higher and higher on the rocky wall below, he raised his head to listen, holding his breath that he might the better catch the first distant creak of oars.

He had not long to wait; for presently, with a distinctness which made his heart beat wildly, he heard the regular plash of oars and the wash of waves against the boat's prow. His first impulse was to call to the

men who were concealed inside the cave; but the sudden recollection that this might frustrate the purpose for which they were there, caused him to restrain his excitement.

The boat approached rapidly, its occupants suspecting nothing, and entered the mouth of the cave almost before Hal had time to recover himself. He heard the oars shipped, and knew there was but one pair. From this he guessed the boat to contain only two persons, perhaps but one. "All the easier for the men yonder to handle 'em," he thought.

"Dark as Ol' Nick in here, cap'n. Blamed if I don't kinder wish we'd shipped thet thar lantern arter all," grumbled a voice which Hal recognized as Bill the mate's.

"Don't you be oneasy, Bill," replied the captain, who seemed to be working the boat; "ol' Cole ud no more forgit his bit o' taller cannel then he'd forgit his grog. Cole, you ol' figger-head, le's hev a glimmer o' light here to make port by! Scuttle my schooner!" he added after a moment, "if the son of a sea-cook ain't late! Hev to send thet cargo o' bones to pipe 'im on deck—he, he!"

With one hand upon the wall, the captain pushed the boat forward; and as he uttered this grim jocularity his head was within a foot of Hal's body. The prow of the boat now struck the ledge at the head of the creek, and the two smugglers, heaping copious curses upon King Cole for his tardiness, scrambled up the steps in the darkness. Once on the ledge they paused to consider what they should do in the absence

of their assistant and his lantern, for without the latter they could not easily land the boat's load.

"Scuttle my schooner! what's the ol' fool about, anyhow?" exclaimed the captain. "You're no better'n a babby with your hand half chopped off, Bill; an' it's a good hour, I kalkilate, sence he signalled all clear. Rum, Bill, rum! thet's wot's wrong with ol' Cole."

"Stan' by the bell-rope, cap'n, an' see if he'll answer to thet," suggested Bill.

The captain groped his way towards the skeleton, and extended his hand to grasp the rope. But instead he grasped the arm of the officer who stood behind the skeleton, just as he was in the act of raising the whistle to his lips.

"Scuttle my schooner, Bill!" roared the captain, tightening his grip on the arm, "ef here ain't King Cole himself, es drunk es a Jamaikie nigger, a-cuddlin' thet durned skel—"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant a shrill whistle rang through the cave, and a sudden flash of light showed the astonished smugglers that it was no drunken comrade they had to deal with, but a stalwart stranger in the familiar garb of the dreaded revenue official.

For one second the captain of the *Nancy Lee* gazed open-mouthed; then, aiming a terrific blow at the man before him, he leapt backward, shouting: "Into the boat, Bill, into the boat—the coppers is on us!"

But before he could reach the boat the four men had thrown themselves upon him. The captain of the *Nancy Lee* was a powerful man, and knew only too

well that if captured it would go hard with him. A desperate struggle ensued, and Bill Hoggins, seizing this opportunity to escape, and caring more for his own safety than that of his comrade, made for the boat.

During the conversation which followed the landing of the smugglers, Hal had raised himself noiselessly from the ledge and awaited the signal for action with beating heart. When the shriek of the whistle pierced the silence of the cave, he dropped lightly and unobserved into the boat, and silently pushed her out into the creek.

When the mate, alarmed by the sudden attack, turned and left his captain to fight it out alone, he scrambled hastily down the slippery rock steps, and, believing the boat to be still there, lifted one leg and stepped boldly forward. The next instant he was neck-deep in water, spluttering and swearing like a Dutchman.

Hal, hearing the splash, hastily pushed the boat towards the mouth of the cave; and the mate, hearing the boat just ahead, and thinking it had gone adrift, struck out for it regardless of his wounded hand.

Presently Hal heard the men shouting to him to bring the boat in. But to do this was to put himself in the power of the ruffian in the water, and he accordingly gave the boat a shove which sent her clear of the cave's mouth. Bill, however, was a powerful swimmer, notwithstanding his wounded hand; and just as the boat emerged from the mouth of the cave he reached it, and seizing the gunwale drew himself

on board before Hal could raise an oar to fight him off.

Hal's first impulse was to plunge overboard and swim for it. But the mate was again too quick for him; and before Hal well knew what had happened, he received a stunning blow on the head which knocked him into the bottom of the boat. The mate seized an oar and prepared to scull back to the ship, but suddenly changed his mind.

"I'll spile the brat's figger-head 'twonst an' hev done with it," he muttered savagely. "Them reveny coves hev got the ol' man to look arter, an' 'tain't likely they'll try to foller—leastways, not jest yet. I'll settle this un, 'tanyrate!"

Raising the heavy oar high in air, he steadied it as best he could with his maimed hand, and holding it thus poised paused a moment to make sure of his blow in the dark.

At the very moment when the oar hung suspended over Hal's head, a hand grasped the side of the boat and pulled it heavily downwards. The mate, who was standing on the after thwart, lost his balance, the oar fell from his grasp, and unable to recover himself he lurched heavily forward and plunged headlong into the sea.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE "NANCY LEE."

THE captain, on finding himself deserted by his mate, exerted his strength to such good purpose that two of his assailants were soon stretched upon the rocky floor of the cave. The others at once closed with him, and a desperate struggle ensued, in the course of which the lantern was kicked over and the combatants plunged into darkness.

For the smuggler captain this was a most fortunate mishap; for, freeing himself from the hold of the officers by a sudden wrench, under cover of the darkness he reached the creek, into which he plunged. On reaching the mouth of the cave he saw the boat not half a dozen yards ahead. A few powerful strokes brought him alongside, where, as we have seen, he seized the gunwale and so precipitated the mate into the water.

"Scuttle my schooner!" muttered the captain as he dragged himself into the boat, "a narrer squeak thet time. But a miss is es good es a mile when the ship's amongst breakers, I reckon. Ahoy, thar, mate!" he shouted as Bill came to the surface spitting oaths and sea-water. "What port air you bound for?"

"For Davy Jones, for all you keer!" replied Bill savagely as he scrambled on board. "What in thunder did you send me over the side for?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed the captain, "is thet you, Bill? I reckoned it was one o' them reveny coves, an' jest thort I'd give 'im a taste o' the briny. Come, hold your jaw!" he growled angrily, as Bill continued his muttering. "You've no call to go an' give sass arter leavin' me in the lurch, an' the darbies es good es on me. Shet up, I tell ye, or, scuttle my schooner! in you goes agin, Bill Hoggins!"

Refraining from further complaint, the mate contented himself with asking: "Whar's the brat?"

"What brat?" demanded the captain. "I ain't seen no one uglier'n yourself, Bill."

"Thet Hal," replied the mate, groping about in the dark. "He es went an' med off with the boat. Here he is, a-skulkin' under the thwart. I'll do for him!" and laying hold of the unconscious boy he drew his knife and raised it to strike.

"Avast thar!" roared the captain seizing his arm; "I'll hev no bloodshed to-night, Bill. Put up thet steel, I tell ye, or, scuttle my schooner! ef I don't hev you put in irons soon's I get on deck! The score agin us is heavy enough a'ready, God knows!"

Maimed as he was the mate was no match for the captain, and reluctantly returned the knife to its sheath, muttering maledictions upon the boy at his feet. Taking no further notice of his companion's sullen mood, the captain seized the remaining oar and began sculling the heavy boat slowly towards the

schooner. When at length they came alongside, Hal was carried on board, and orders were given to make sail with all possible speed.

When the smuggler captain succeeded in making his escape into the creek, the revenue men shouted to Hal to run the boat in. Receiving no answer, and deeply mortified that the smugglers had proved too many for them, they stood for a moment irresolute.

The officer in charge was the first to recover his presence of mind. "To the cutter, lads!" he cried excitedly as he relighted the lantern; "to the cutter, or the villains will get away! I fear the boy is in their power again. We must give chase, or it's all up with him!"

In half an hour's time the cutter, with all her canvas set, glided from the rear of the island where she had lain at anchor since dark. Inshore the wind was light; but in the bay there was a good capful blowing. With the wind abeam the cutter speedily gained headway, and was soon scudding towards the anchorage of the *Nancy Lee*.

Meantime there had been much delay in getting the schooner under weigh; for besides the captain and mate, of whom the latter was able to lend little or no assistance, there was but one man aboard. And so it happened that by the time the smuggler's anchor was heaved and sail made, the cutter was bearing down upon her at a spanking pace.

The *Nancy Lee* was clipper-built, and famous as the fleetest craft in all the bay. More than once she had been compelled to run from the revenue boats, and on

each of these occasions had shown her pursuers a clean pair of heels. Now, her captain, knowing nothing as yet of the proximity of the trim cutter, and supposing the only means of pursuit at the disposal of the revenue men to be a row-boat, or at the best a chance fishing-snack, had little fear of pursuit.

So he clapped on all sail, and spat tobacco juice defiantly in the direction of the cave as he brought the *Nancy Lee* a few points nearer the wind and steered for the open sea.

"Them reveny coves ain't no great shakes at handlin' a boat, Bill," he observed complacently from his post at the wheel; "an' I rayther guess they'll hev a long run ef they trys to foller us."

"Pr'aps," was the gruff reply of the mate, who was still far from being in a good humour. "On'y I heer'd t'other day they'd got a spick-an'-span new cutter up to the settlement, wot was reckoned ud lick anythin' afloat in this bay. Howsumever, thet's neither here nor thar at this present speakin'. What I wants to to know is, wot's to be done with the brat?"

"Let the brat alone, Bill; we'll ship 'im off to the West Injies the first chance we gits," replied the captain. "A few months afore the mast 'll take the blab out o' him, I kalkilate. Bill," he added presently, after gazing intently astern for some minutes, "kin you make out anythin' yander?"

The mate peered long into the darkness before replying. Then he said slowly: "Kinder looks es if they was arter us, cap'n."

The captain laughed. "Thet's my idee too," said

he. "Let 'em come, the landlubbers! A starn chase is a long chase, an', scuttle my schooner! if the *Nancy Lee* ain't es tight a craft es floats! Thet for their cutter an' all aboard her!" growled the captain, letting fly a flood of tobacco juice in the wake of his vessel which might well have swamped a ship's gig.

With the turn of the tide the breeze freshened, and the two vessels, as though thrilled to their very keels by the excitement of the chase, flew through the dark waters like living things. For a long time it was impossible to determine which was the better vessel; but gradually the schooner's larger spread of sail told in the race, and she began slowly but surely to crawl away from her pursuers.

"We're a-leavin' 'em behin', Bill!" chuckled the captain. "Thar ain't nary a keel in the bay es kin overhaul the *Nancy Lee* on a starn chase. Here, mate, you take the wheel while I goes below a jiffy. A glass o' grog ud freshen me up a bit arter that wettin', I guess. Steddy's the word, mate!" and the captain, in high good-humour, dived down the companion after his refresher.

"Great stuff, thet!" said he to himself with a loud smack of his tobacco-stained lips; "*thet* won't do the old schooner no manner o' harm, I reckon."

But the captain was out of his reckoning for once. That one glass of grog did work the *Nancy Lee* harm, and that, too, almost before he again set foot on deck. But to understand what now happened we must return to our hero, whom we left lying on the schooner's deck, unconscious.

As Hal slowly recovered from the effect of the stunning contact of Bill Hoggin's fist with his left ear, and a severe blow inflicted by the sharp edge of the thwart as he fell, he heard the hurried trampling of feet, the creaking of blocks, and the flapping of sails, and knew he had been carried on board the schooner. He found himself, when able to sit up and look round, forward of the cabin, almost on the spot where he had lain once before, the night he and little Tom had effected so timely an escape. Too sick and giddy to rise, he stretched himself again upon the cool planks, and as he lay there he overheard every word of the conversation which passed between the captain and his mate.

In this way he learned of the revenue cutter's pursuit; learned also that she was gradually falling behind in the race. This would, he knew only too well, lead to unpleasant consequences for himself; for he had caught the captain's remark about shipping him off to the West Indies. Now, Hal had no intention of going to the West Indies if he could help it. But how to help it—there was the rub! One means only of extricating himself from the trap into which he had fallen presented itself—to play into the hands of the pursuers. How to do this effectually was a puzzle which Hal set himself resolutely to work out.

At last he hit upon a plan which he believed would prove most effectual, if he could only carry it out. But there was an obstacle in the way, and that obstacle was none other than the mate, Bill Hoggins, who kept trudging back and forth every few minutes between the wheel and the schooner's bows, where the

one deck "hand" was on the look-out. As he never once passed the spot where Hal lay without casting a malignant glance at the recumbent figure of the boy, Hal knew that any movement on his part was sure to be detected. And yet, if he could get the mate out of the way for five minutes, he believed he could so disable the schooner as to place her entirely at the mercy of the cutter.

Hal drew his clasp-knife from his pocket, and holding it open in his hand waited very impatiently, for every moment now increased the distance between the two vessels and rendered success less certain. Would nothing divert the lynx eye of the mate for one short five minutes? Would it never come, that longed-for opportunity?

At last, with a great thrill of triumph at his heart, Hal heard the captain order the mate to the wheel. Then the captain entered the cabin, and Hal knew his opportunity had come. Brief though it was—only so long as it took the captain to drink that one glass of grog which was to "do the old schooner no manner o' harm"—it was enough for Hal's purpose.

Very softly he stole along the deck, knife in hand, to where the fore-halyards hummed in the stiff-blowing breeze. Ten seconds enabled him to ascertain which of the ropes supported the gaff of the straining fore-sail; and grasping it with one hand, with the other he drew the knife again and again across the taut strands. The rope strained, snapped; and ere Hal had well regained the shelter of the cabin, the great sail came threshing and rattling to the deck. The effect was

instantaneous. Before the captain could reach the deck, or the mate give a turn to the wheel with his single hand, the *Nancy Lee* luffed sharply into the very teeth of the wind and directly across the bows of the rapidly nearing cutter.

Ignorant of the cause of this sudden change in the vessel's course, the captain rushed from the cabin shouting: "Port! hard a-port! Let her fall off, I tell 'ee, or them reveny coves 'll be aboard of us in less'n no time!" He seized the wheel; but it was too late. Almost before he knew the cause of the disaster, the cutter was alongside and half her crew on deck.

With a shout they threw themselves upon the two men who stood by the schooner's wheel. The captain, seeing that it was all up with him, made scarce a show of resistance. But Bill Hoggins was too quick for them. Land was not far distant, and the mate was a powerful swimmer. For an instant he hesitated; then with a single leap cleared the taffrail and plunged into the sea.

"Let him go," said the officer who led the cutter's crew. "The bottom 'll be the first land he touches, or I'm mistaken."

When the revenue men learned the nature of the clever act to which they owed the capture of the *Nancy Lee*, their admiration of Hal's cool-headed bravery was unbounded.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAL MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIS FIRST MOOSE.

WHEN the contraband goods found in Dead-man's Cave were transferred to the cutter, Hal watched the removal with keen interest; but amongst all the booty there was nothing that in the least resembled the stolen treasure-chest. After the capture of his master, Lord Chancellor went to grace Mrs. Pratt's kitchen. That event, too, brought Hal a new friend. This was none other than John Bull, the hermit's dog, who attached himself to Hal with a pertinacity which soon grew into a strong mutual regard.

Weeks passed into months, the first snows of the long Canadian winter fell, and still Hal remained one of the Pratt family; for Eben Pratt had returned from sea only to join a gang of lumbermen going into winter quarters in the woods.

Ben Christmas had moved into the hermit's vacant hut for the winter, and Hal saw a good deal of him. When the snow fell to a sufficient depth Ben taught him the art of snow-shoeing, in which Hal speedily became proficient. Often of an evening, too, he would sit in the smoky hut and listen to the Indian's tales of adventure by flood and forest.

One evening while they were thus gathered about the fire, the Indian related a story of a moose-hunt, and Hal, who had never seen a moose, asked what the animal was like.

"You no got moose your country?" cried the Indian in astonishment. "He like ox, only plenty big—big leg, big horn, big body. He live 'way back in woods. Much snow come, moose no run far. Then Injun put on snow-shoe, take gun, shoot him. He meat bery good," said Ben, smacking his lips over an imaginary moose-steak.

"Ben, I've got an idea," said Hal abruptly. "Why can't we go on a moose-hunt?"

"Snow deep, long tramp, bery cold, no fire-water got," replied Ben, summarizing his objections in his usual brief fashion.

"Snow-shoeing was never better than just now," urged Hal. "The distance and cold I don't mind a bit; and as for whisky, why, you're better without that, Ben. Say you'll go, that's a good fellow!"

Ben pondered a few moments. "All right," he said at length, by no means averse to increasing his winter supplies by a successful hunt. "Miss Pratt say yes, then Injun go."

"I don't think she'll object, but I'll ask her to-night," promptly responded Hal. "What shall we need to take with us?"

"Gun, blanket, eat-up stuff," said Ben.

"Eat-up stuff! What's that?"

"Bread, meat," replied the Indian.

"Oh!" said Hal. "But I have no gun."

"You no mind gun. Injun got."

"Very well. And when are we to start?"

"To-morrow. Injun know warm cabin back in woods. Sleep there nights, hunt in day."

So it was arranged, and the same evening Hal asked Mrs. Pratt's permission. At first the good woman demurred, but Hal pressed his case so skilfully that she at last yielded, exacting a promise, however, that he would return in three days' time. To this Hal readily agreed; and ere bed-time came all necessary preparations had been made for the start.

The morning broke bright and cold; and when Hal, with blanket and provisions strapped upon his sturdy young shoulders, reached the hut, he found the Indian equipped for the journey. Very hunter-like indeed did Ben look in his leathern leggings and coon-skin cap, with rifle and axe slung at his back.

John Bull had followed Hal, and at sight of the dog the Indian made a grimace of disapproval. "Dog no good, scare moose, leave behind," was his brief observation.

So John Bull, much against his will, was imprisoned for the nonce in the hut. Then, the thongs of the snow-shoes adjusted, with a laughing good-bye to Millie, who had insisted on accompanying him thus far, Hal struck into the Indian's trail, and soon the hut and the girl, who waved a farewell, were lost to view behind the scattered spruce and fir which fringed the forest.

Half an hour on the snow-shoes, and they were far in the woods. Here among the stately maples and

beeches all was silent, save for the occasional snapping of a snow-laden bough, or the scurrying flight of a frightened partridge; while the track of a rabbit or the delicate tracery of a squirrel's feet in the light surface snow, upon which the slanting winter sunshine fell in ragged patches through the leafless branches, were the only signs of life.

Fully an hour after the start Hal heard the quick bark of a dog, and looking back saw John Bull plunging through the snow towards him.

"Ben!" he shouted to the Indian, who was some yards in advance; "here's John Bull! What's to be done?"

"Let dog come," replied Ben good-naturedly. "He no good, frighten moose; but no go back now."

So John Bull had his way, and kept as close to his master's heels as the difficulties of dragging his podgy body through the snow would permit. Hal every now and then whistled encouragingly to his ugly-mouthed but faithful follower, and concluded that his company was not so bad a thing after all. And he was right, as the dog shortly proved.

The Indian seemed to find his way through the mazes of the trackless forest by some unerring instinct; and when at noon they came upon the deserted cabin which was to be their head-quarters during the hunt, a dozen miles of forest lay between them and home. The structure was almost buried beneath the snow; but they managed at last to clear a way to the door, which they forced open with but little difficulty.

A pile of dry wood stood in one corner, and draw-

ing upon this opportune store, the Indian soon had a cheery fire blazing on the broad hearth. A cold meal followed, in the midst of which Hal, suddenly missing the dog, exclaimed: "Where's John Bull?"

"Door open; he go out, p'r'aps," grunted the Indian with his mouth full.

On reaching the door, which was slightly ajar, Hal heard John Bull's loud bark in the rear of the hut. "Whatever made him sneak off in that way—right in the middle of dinner, too?" he said to himself; then suddenly exclaimed aloud, "Hello! what's up?"

For just ahead he caught sight of John Bull plunging about in the snow in a state of the wildest excitement. Hal whistled and called, but the sound of his voice only made the dog bark more furiously.

Wondering what could be the matter, Hal pushed forward, and presently caught sight of what he at first took to be a broken tree-trunk. But as he drew nearer the object moved, and with a start Hal saw that what he had mistaken for a tree was in reality a grayish-coloured animal of large size, standing belly-deep in the snow, and shaking its great antlers menacingly at John Bull.

"Must be a moose!" said he with a whistle of surprise. "I'll have a look at him and then call Ben." And not dreaming of danger he approached nearer, and stood watching the majestic animal which John Bull had brought to bay.

For fully a minute the moose sniffed the air fiercely and maintained his position; then, realizing that he had enemies other than the dog to deal with, he

lowered his great antlers, and with an angry snort of defiance rushed upon the boy. Hal uttered a cry of alarm and turned to run; but his foot slipping before he had taken a dozen steps, he fell headlong in the treacherous snow, where he struggled in vain to regain his feet. He heard the snorting of the infuriated moose as it ploughed its way towards him, felt the creature's hot breath on his neck. Then something sprang past him in the snow, there was a hoarse gurgling growl, followed by the noise of a fierce struggle. By an almost superhuman effort he staggered to his feet, shouting loudly for Ben.

The crack of a rifle told him that Ben was already on the scene; and a moment later the Indian ran past him, trailing his still-smoking weapon in the snow. Then Hal turned and saw how narrow had been his escape.

At the very moment when the moose had raised its powerful fore-foot to deal him his death-blow, John Bull had sprung to the rescue and fastened his fangs in the animal's throat with a grip which no strength could shake off. At the same instant the Indian, alarmed by the outcry, had emerged from the hut, rifle in hand, and with unerring aim brought the moose to the ground.

Standing over the prostrate and stiffening form of this monarch of the forest, Hal experienced a singular conflict of feelings. Gratitude towards the Indian and the faithful dog gave way to pity as he watched the great creature's eyes glaze, and the quivering nostrils draw their last breath of the free forest air.

"You've saved my life again, Ben!" he cried.
"But what a pity to kill anything so strong and noble!"

"Ugh! Dog save, not Injun," was Ben's disclaimer.
"Big pity, little meat. God plenty sense got. Injun no shoot, how he live?" he grunted, stolidly proceeding to strip the skin from the carcass.

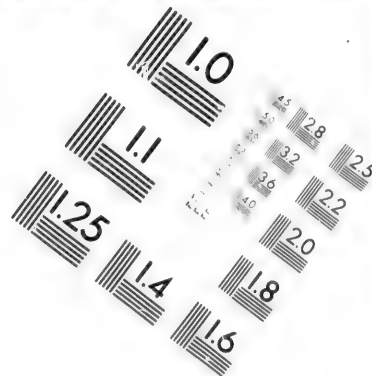
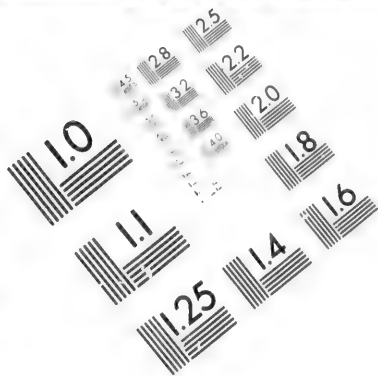
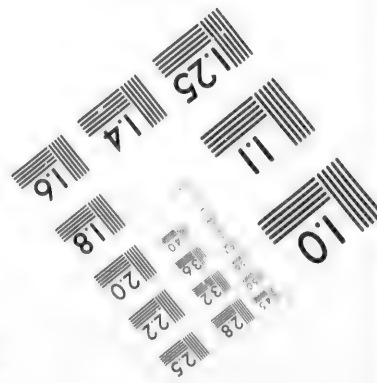
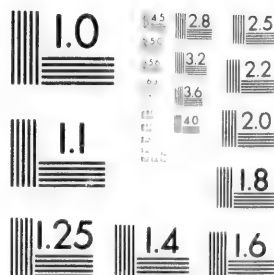


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)



Photographic
Sciences
Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 872-4503

28 25
32 22
20
8

10

CHAPTER XX.

LOST IN THE SNOWY FOREST.

THE work of cutting up the moose and of exposing its flesh upon elevated poles, where it might freeze unmolested by prowling foxes, occupied Hal and the Indian the greater part of the afternoon; for it was Ben's intention, after the meat had frozen thoroughly, to pack it away in the cabin, and by successive journeys throughout the winter to transport the whole of it to his hut for family consumption. The capture of such a prize was a great boon to the poverty-stricken Indian, and put him in high good-humour.

Half-buried in the sheltering snow as the cabin was, the roaring fire which the Indian kept up well into the night made the place as cosy as anyone could have desired; and after a hearty supper of juicy tenderloin, Hal and his companion rolled themselves in their blankets, and were soon wrapt in the dreamless slumber of the thoroughly wearied.

"Never slept so sound in all my life!" remarked Hal on waking in the morning to find Ben already up and a smoking breakfast ready.

Ben laughed the low impassive laugh of his race. "Snow-shoe good medicine," he observed as he motioned Hal to help himself to the food.

"What's your plan for to-day, Ben?" asked Hal, seconding the Indian's attack upon the "eat-up stuff" with a hearty good-will.

"More moose," replied Ben. "Injun out scouting early—"

"Out already this morning?"

"Ugh! you sleep, Injun go see moose-trail. Plenty track, big yard near got."

The morning was dull, almost gloomy in the thick forest, and the Indian predicted a fall of snow before many hours. Breakfast at an end, they struck boldly into the forest behind the hut, and soon came upon a beaten track which the Indian said was a moose-path leading to a "yard" or winter rendezvous of the game. What little wind there was blew directly in their faces as they silently followed the windings of the path among the trees, the Indian keeping a sharp look-out ahead. They had proceeded some distance in this manner when Ben suddenly raised his hand in token of caution, and stepping behind a tree beckoned Hal to his side.

Peering round the trunk Hal saw a magnificent moose not more than thirty yards ahead, quietly browsing off the lower branches of a tree. He stood with head half turned towards the wind, and thus presented his left side full to the hunters.

With one low word of command to the dog, who, to prevent his making untimely demonstrations, had been led by a bit of rope, Ben adjusted his rifle across a convenient branch and bade Hal take his place.

"Aim steady—right in middle fore-shoulder—you no miss! Now!" he whispered.

Under Ben's directions Hal grasped the rifle, took the best aim he could, and pulled the trigger. The report was answered by a hundred echoes, and as the white smoke floated away on the frosty air he saw the moose leap wildly, sink forward upon its knees, and roll over in the snow without a struggle.

The Indian uttered a loud whoop. "Ugh!" he cried; "bullet go right through heart! Some day you great hunter make!"

Hal was as pleased as the Indian at the unexpected effect of his shot, and contemplated the game with no little pride, entirely forgetting, in the excitement of the moment, the feelings which a similar scene had awakened within him only the day before.

Ben at once set about making preparations for transporting the game to the cabin; for the Indian was a practical hunter, and no lover of moose-shooting as a mere sport. First he cut a forked tree, the butt two or three inches in diameter, the prongs about five feet long, and trimmed the butt into the form of a rude sled-runner. A third prong was next secured between the others by means of a thong stripped from the hide; and when the hide itself was removed and laid upon this, the rude sled was ready for the meat, which the Indian, assisted by Hal, proceeded to flay.

These preparations occupied fully two hours, and long before they were completed the snow, which had all day been threatening, began to fall thickly and silently. So engrossed were they with their task,

that not until the wind began to rise, whirling the fast-falling flakes in thick, circling eddies, did they become aware of the change in the weather. At last the Indian looked up with an exclamation of dismay.

"What's the matter?" asked Hal.

"Snow," replied Ben. "Plenty coming, thick get, cover trail—ugh!"

Without further delay the snow-shoes were strapped on, and dragging the heavily-laden sled behind them they struck into the forest, and began making the best of their way back to the cabin.

The snow, falling thickly, quickly obliterated the slight indentations made by their snow-shoes on the outward tramp; and after plunging blindly on for some time in what he supposed to be the right direction, the Indian stopped and looked about in some perplexity. Then, apparently reassured, he once more moved forward; but after a time, the storm growing thicker and fiercer the while, he again came to a standstill, looking very grave.

"What is it, Ben?" asked Hal. "We're all right. See, there are tracks," and he pointed to the half-covered print of a snow-shoe.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian; "them track no good. Injun make little while ago. We going round, round."

The spot was one they had passed half an hour before. They had travelled in a circle!

By this time they should have reached the cabin. But no cabin was in sight. To add to the perplexity of their situation, the wind had changed while they were busied over the game. No trace of moose-path

or of snow-shoe track was to be seen; nothing but snow. Snow, trackless and cold, beneath their feet; snow clinging to the branches above; snow filling the whole air, and shutting them in as with a winding sheet.

Mile after mile, hour after hour, they plodded on, the storm growing fiercer and hope fainter with every step. Even the Indian's brute-like instinct failed him. They were hopelessly lost in the snowy forest.

Once the Indian tried to kindle a fire; but the wind howled defiance at the attempt, and snatched the half-lighted birch-bark from his very grasp. As night closed in Hal's strength began to fail. Thus far they had continued to drag the sled; now it was reluctantly abandoned, and again for a time Hal struggled on. But at last he gave up altogether.

"Ben," he gasped, sinking down in the snow, "I can't go another step!"

Inaction meant certain death in that biting blast; and without a word the Indian leaned his rifle against a tree, lifted Hal upon his feet, and half-supporting, half-carrying him, continued that journey which, with every forward stride, seemed the more surely to lead to a grave of snow.

At last the Indian halted. Placing the now half-unconscious boy in a sitting posture against the more sheltered side of a tree, he circled about the spot until he found a birch, from which with the aid of his knife he proceeded to strip a large piece of bark.

Very slowly, for his fingers were sorely benumbed by the cold, he fashioned this into a rude trumpet

some two feet in length. Then inflating his lungs to their fullest, he applied his lips to the smaller end, and blew a blast which might have been heard for miles on the furious gale—the wonderful moose-call of the Canadian Indian.

“Ugh!” he muttered; “Injun no want moose—God send lumberman, mebbby.”

Lifting Hal once more in his arms the brave fellow struggled on, stopping at frequent intervals to send that long-drawn note quavering through the storm. In his anxiety for his companion's safety he took no heed of the disappearance of John Bull.

CHAPTER XXL

THE RESCUE

A WILD night, mates," said Eben Pratt as he relighted his pipe and dealt the cards for a fresh game. "A wild night, an' onfortnit them es is out in it."

Certainly the inmates of the logging camp were neither unfortunate nor uncomfortable, bad as the night was. The thick wooden walls of their rough cabin defied the storm, as the great fire roaring up the broad chimney defied the cold.

The lurid glow of the fire, the only light in the cabin, fell broadly upon the sturdy lumbermen as they sat in various attitudes about the long table, some engaged in a social game at cards, others puffing idly at their clay pipes. There were ten of them in all: rough, good-natured fellows with brawny arms, on which the muscles stood out like whip-cord, and faces which, if not very intelligent, were yet kindly and to be trusted.

"Much we need keer who's out in it," replied another of the card party, without taking his pipe from his teeth. "Hones' folks ain't likely to be abroad in sech weather."

"Wonder *you're* indoors then, mate," said Eben Pratt with a good-humoured laugh, in which the others joined.

"What you mean by that, Eben Pratt?" cried the other angrily. "Mebby I'm es hones' a man es you or your father afore you; so none of them insinuations o' yourn!"

"No offence, mate," replied Eben calmly. "Don't you know the taste of a joke yet, man?"

"Bes' keep sech jokes for them es likes 'em—I don't want none on 'em," grumbled the other, somewhat mollified.

We have said that the faces of these lumbermen were kindly and to be trusted. There was one exception, however, and that exception was the man who had resented Eben Pratt's joke. Just who he was, or where he came from, none of the lumber "gang" knew. He called himself Ame Harlow; and being a powerful man and a willing worker, the "boss," or head-lumberman, who was none other than Eben Pratt himself, was satisfied, and asked no questions as to his past history. In the lumber woods, strength to swing the axe for hours at a stretch was a far stronger recommendation than good looks.

For Harlow's looks were anything but pleasing. His clean-shaven face showed a mouth that looked positively wicked when the man was angered; and his eye, for he had but one, was for all the world like the stern port of some old-time pirate cruiser, through which the death-dealing gun showed grimly. He lurched rather than walked, as though momentarily

expecting a blow, or as if stooping to deal one to a fallen enemy. In manner, too, the man was taciturn and sullen, resenting friendly advances on the part of his comrades with a gruffness which won for him their hearty dislike. This evening he had so far unbent as to join them at play, holding his cards in his right hand and dealing with his left in a manner so hurried that an observer would scarcely have noticed the absence of three fingers from the hand.

Eben Pratt, however, had often noticed this loss, and wondered how it had occurred. He himself had a livid scar across one cheek, and never wearied of telling how he had received it during the American civil war.

"Mate," he said after a little, in the hope of atoning for the annoyance caused by his joke, "you've never told us how you kem to lose them fivers of yourn."

"No," replied Harlow surlily, removing his maimed hand from the table as he spoke; "an' wot's more, I never shell."

"No offence," said Eben; "on'y I thought mebbey thar might be a bit of a yarn connected with the matter es the boys ud like to hear."

"No thar ain't," said Harlow, rising abruptly. "They're gone, an' that's all thar is of it."

Eben laughed. "Never seen sech a tetchy feller!" he said. "Like a clam at low-water; can't lay a finger on 'im but he draws into his shell. Hello! what's that?"

This exclamation was caused by a loud scratching at the door of the cabin. Rising from the table

Eben strode to the door, threw it wide open, and admitted—John Bull!

"Wal, I'm blest!" exclaimed Eben; then added uneasily, "It's that boy Hal's dog—the one es uster b'long to the ol' hermit. Must be suthin' wrong at home, else how'd he come here?"

John Bull's joy at having gained the shelter of the hut was unbounded. He fawned upon Eben, leaping up to lick his hands, and emitting short, sharp barks of recognition and delight.

But on catching sight of the man Harlow his manner suddenly changed, and he sprang at the lumberman with a savage growl.

"Seems to know you, mate," said Eben, calling the dog off. "Seen you afore—down my way, p'r'aps?"

Harlow's only reply was a savage kick. Happily for himself it fell short of its mark; while the dog ran to the door and began scratching as vigorously to get out as he had done a few minutes before to get in.

"Must be someone with him," observed Eben, hastily donning his cap and boots. Three or four of the other men did the same, and bade him take the lead.

When the door was opened John Bull darted out, followed by the lumbermen as closely as the blinding snow permitted. When he found himself too far in advance the intelligent dog waited, barking until the party came up. In this manner they proceeded for some distance, when Eben Pratt pulled up suddenly.

"Hark, mates!" he exclaimed. "D'ye hear that?"

But no one had heard aught save the shrill shrieking of the snow-laden blast through the leafless trees. On they struggled again, John Bull still leading.

"Thar!" cried Eben presently; "thar it is agin!"

This time there was no mistake about it. Above the howling of the storm could be distinctly heard a far-away unearthly note, gradually increasing in strength for some fifteen seconds, then dying away in a strain of almost despairing wildness. A sound never to be forgotten! for in it anxiety, impatience, terror, seemed to struggle for the mastery.

Eben Pratt was the first to speak. "Mates," said he, "thet's a moose-horn, an' thar's on'y one man in these 'ere parts kin make sech a tearin' nise at the end o' it, an' thet's Injun Ben. I reckon this ain't no night for callin' moose. Thar's suthin' wrong, es I sed a while back, or my name ain't Pratt! But this ain't no time for speck'latin', so let's git ahead."

They got ahead at so steady a pace, that after half an hour's plodding through the snow and buffeting with the storm, they received a faint response to their shouts. Ten minutes more and they came upon a man struggling towards them in a state of almost complete exhaustion.

"That you, Ben?" cried Eben.

The Indian's only reply was an inarticulate moan as he laid the unconscious body of his boy companion at the lumbermen's feet and sank exhausted upon the snow.

"Jest as I thought," said Eben, stooping and looking into Hal's face. "Bin out moose-huntin' an' got lost

in the storm. The boy must hev give in a good while back, an' the Injun's carried him."

"Ugh!" grunted Ben, who was now sufficiently recovered to speak. "White boy—Injun—all one—brother."

"You hev the right sort o' grit in you, Ben!" said Eben admiringly. "An' now jes' try an' pull yourself together an' git to the camp."

After a short rest Ben pulled himself together and they set out for the cabin, the men carrying Hal, who was too exhausted to walk. In due time the cabin was reached, and Ben's heart having been made glad by a steaming glass of rum and water, he related the events of the day.

John Bull's part in the rescue was easily explained. Chancing upon one of the numerous camp paths, he had left the Indian unperceived, made his way to the cabin, and so given the alarm in the very nick of time. The Indian's bravery and the dog's intelligence had once more saved Hal's life.

Hal, fortunately enough, escaped with only a few slight frost-bites. The extreme exhaustion which had followed the prolonged exertion of that eventful day quickly passed off, and warmth, food, and rest soon put him all right again.

They were all seated about the fire, talking over the adventure and lauding the Indian's courage, when Harlow rose from the dark corner where he had ensconced himself after his usual fashion, and crossed the room to obtain a drink of water from a bucket which stood on a bench against the wall. John Bull

was lying at Hal's feet, apparently asleep; but no sooner did Harlow stir than the dog sprang towards him with a savage growl.

"Call off that dog of yours," cried Harlow with an oath, "or I'll twist his neck!"

At these words Hal, who had already quieted the dog, started and looked quickly round. But Harlow had slouched back to his corner, where his face was undistinguishable; and Hal fell asleep that night wondering why the sound of this man's voice had given him such a queer turn. John Bull, curled up at his master's feet, all through the night kept one sleepless eye upon a certain bunk, and indulged in a smothered growl whenever its occupant moved.

Did John Bull's sensitive nose scent danger to his young master in the air breathed by the man Harlow?

CHAPTER XXII

JOHN BULL RUNS AN ENEMY TO EARTH.

HARLOW did not turn out with the rest in the morning. He had overworked his lame hand and must have a day's rest, he said. When the other men went to their work he lay motionless in his bunk.

Hal slept late, and so knew nothing of Harlow's indisposition. As he sat by the fire after breakfast, with John Bull at his feet, he supposed himself to be quite alone in the cabin. The interior of the place was dark even by day, for the snow rose above the level of the two small windows; and as the occupant of the bunk in the far corner made not the slightest movement, neither Hal nor the quick-eared dog suspected his presence.

The Indian had gone off early in search of his rifle, and Hal was now expecting him back. "Ben's a long time away," he said to himself as he rose and went to the door. "Here, John Bull! come here, sir!" This to the dog, who, catching sight of a venturesome rabbit, had darted into the open air and refused to be recalled. Hal shut the door and went back to the fire, supposing that the dog would speedily return.

He had scarcely resumed his seat when he was

startled by the sound of a footfall on the floor behind him, and looking quickly round was amazed to find himself face to face with the man who had so strongly roused his suspicions the evening before. Harlow stood between Hal and the door, his one eye glaring upon the boy with an evil light.

"Des you know me?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Hal after a prolonged and uneasy scrutiny of the fellow's face. "You are Bill Hoggins."

"Bill Hoggins without his beard," said the other with a brutal laugh. "But losin' his whisker don't spile a dog's bite, des it? Kin you guess what ails my hand here, that I ain't at work this morning? No? Well, I'll tell you—the fingers what you didn't chop off is itchin' like mad to git at you! Three times a'ready you've give me the slip; but I'll squar accounts with you this time, young feller, or my name ain't Bill Hoggins, otherwise Ame Harlow."

Hal was no coward. Indeed, he possessed, as boys often do, all the fearless courage of a man, without a man's strength to back it up. And the situation was one which required both. He was alone with a desperate man, who had been baulked too often of his brute vengeance to let the present opportunity slip. Bitterly did he regret the absence of John Bull, whose presence would now be a certain safeguard. He looked towards the door, but it was closed, and between it and himself stood the brutal mate of the *Nancy Lee*.

The mate saw the look and laughed harshly. "No, the dog's not come yit," he said with an oath; "an' what's more, he can't git in if he des. You an' me

has got to settle this atween ourselves; an' I ain't goin' to waste no time blabbin' when thar's work to be done."

So saying he picked up an axe and advanced towards Hal, who, though terrified by the mate's savage aspect, had yet sufficient presence of mind to perceive that his only hope lay in gaining time. With Ben Christmas likely to return at any moment, a delay of even a few minutes might save his life. So, as the mate advanced, Hal, fearing the villain meant to strike him with the axe, retreated.

"I ain't goin' to do for you with this," said the mate, dropping the axe to his side as he spoke, and at the same time getting Hal into a corner by a quick movement. "None of your yellin' an' kickin'!" he muttered as he seized him tightly by the arm and dragged him towards the table. "I ain't agoin' to kill you, much es I'd like to—killin's too risky a business in this kentry."

Somewhat reassured by this statement Hal suffered himself to be led to the table, praying that Ben might return without delay. "What are you going to do to me?" he asked, more to gain time than because he cared to know what terrible form the ruffian's vengeance was about to take.

"Nothin' much," said the mate with another of his hoarse laughs. "I on'y wants a fair valyer for them fingers you snipped off. See here, this is where they was—three on 'em, as purty ones es you ever see! Eye for eye an' tooth for tooth—that's what Scripture sez; an' I reckon it means fingers, too."

"You're not going to cut off my fingers?" exclaimed Hal, starting back in horror.

"That's about the size of it!" cried the mate in fiendish exultation. "Clean off—three on 'em for my three, an' o e more for ol' friendship's sake. Lay your hand on the table here—flat out—so! Now, don't move, or I'll make it worse for ye!"

With blanched cheeks Hal laid his trembling hand palm downwards upon the table. He knew that to disobey would be almost certain death, for the wretch beside him was capable of any crime. But even in the horror of that moment he did not lose his presence of mind. He fancied he heard footsteps without, faint yet and far away, but certainly footsteps; and he hoped by a quick movement to frustrate the purpose of this brute in human shape, if only for a few moments, for those moments might prove his salvation. So he laid his hand on the table and with wild eyes watched the mate raise the axe and balance it above his fiendish head.

An instant and the keen blade descended—but not upon Hal's fingers; for, quick as thought, he withdrew his hand, and the axe, impelled with all the force of the mate's strong arms, buried itself half-way to the handle in the solid deal table.

For one instant the mate regarded the quivering axe with exultant face; then perceiving the trick that had been played upon him, with a horrid oath he threw himself upon Hal. But scarcely had his hand touched the boy's shoulder when the cabin door was thrown open and Ben Christmas entered, rifle in hand.

imed

te in
or my
your
don't

hand
at to
retch
n the
nce of
faint
d he
urpose
a few
salva-
wild
nce it

at not
drew
ce of
o the

g axe
that
h he
hand
was
hand.



JOHN BULL'S VENGEANCE



At sight of him the mate retreated quickly into the deeper shade of the corner; and before Hal could utter even so much as a cry, he had glided past the Indian into the open air.

When Hal, pointing to the axe still quivering in the table, explained what had happened, Ben uttered one guttural exclamation of wrath and hurried from the cabin. But the mate, foreseeing probable reprisals on his part, was already out of sight in the forest, where, owing to the multiplicity of the lumbermen's tracks, it was impossible to trace him.

"Ugh! Let big rascal go," grunted Ben; "sharp fox meet sharp trap some day." By which he meant that the most cunning fox gets caught at last. And Ben was right; for the trap that was to close its teeth on the rascally mate was already set.

Dinner-time came and passed, all preparations for the return journey were made, and still no John Bull appeared. Hal began to grow uneasy.

"No mind dog," was the Indian's advice. "He good nose got. Smell track—come after."

So they bade the genial lumbermen good-bye and started, the Indian lamenting the loss of his sled-load of moose-meat, Hal sorely distressed by the singular disappearance of his dog.

The snow was in even better condition than before the storm, and the first few miles has been left swiftly behind, when they came upon moccasin tracks.

"Bill Hoggin's track. Dog go with him," observed Ben pointing to the marks of a dog's paws which showed close beside the footprints.

"John Bull wouldn't follow that fellow!" objected Hal. "Why, he hates him worse than poison!"

"Pretty soon see," replied the Indian. "He no far gone. Catch him up little while."

Just ahead was a shallow dell through which ran a brook, now frozen over and buried beneath the snow. The trees were closer here, a thickish growth of spruce and fir giving the spot a dark, uninviting appearance which made one approaching it from the lighter forest shiver. The tracks ran directly towards this spot, and Ben was following them slightly in advance of his companion when he uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"What is it, Ben?" asked Hal, striding to the Indian's side.

For reply Ben pointed to a number of draggled blotches on the surface of the snow. Hal shuddered as he examined them, for they were the marks of blood.

The tracks now became more irregular, as though the person producing them had staggered on under some heavy burden; while the red blotches grew more and more numerous until they formed an unbroken trail. The Indian, still keeping the lead, proceeded slowly, eyeing every clump of bushes suspiciously. Suddenly, as they skirted the base of a wide-spreading spruce, he sprang forward towards a dark object which lay upon the surface of the snow. Hal was at his side in a second. Then with a loud cry he fell on his knees beside the awful thing.

Upon his back lay the mate of the *Nancy Lee*, and

on the body, his teeth fast set in the ghastly throat, was stretched the missing dog, John Bull!

Even the stolid Indian was for the moment transfixed with horror at the awful spectacle. When at last he stooped over the bodies he found both man and dog stone dead.

In the snow were traces of a fearful struggle, showing but too plainly how desperately the doomed wretch had fought for his life. Even now, as he lay stark and stiff with that relentless death-grip upon his throat, one hand grasped the haft of his knife, which his last effort had driven to the dog's heart.

How it had all happened was easy of conjecture. The dog, in making his way back to the cabin, had crossed the trail of the mate as he fled from it. With the scent, all his bull-dog hatred of the man who was his master's enemy as well as his own had flamed up afresh, and he had tracked the wretch silently but surely through the forest. In this lonely spot he had come up with him, and just when the mate was, perhaps, congratulating himself on his escape, had sprung upon him and taken his life at the cost of his own.

So grief-stricken was Hal on discovering the faithful dog to be dead that he scarcely heard the Indian bid him remain near the body until he should return to the lumber camp and procure assistance. Long after Ben had glided away he knelt beside the bodies of the man who had been his deadliest enemy and the dog who had been his dearest friend. Then he rose, and scraping a deep hole in the snow tenderly laid the

lifeless form of John Bull therein and buried him out of sight.

The half-dozen lumbermen who returned with Ben Christmas speedily constructed a rough sled, upon which they laid the dead man, and set out at once for the camp leaving Hal and the Indian to pursue their homeward journey. As he was turning away from the scene of the tragic struggle, Hal caught sight of a tattered leathern wallet lying on the spot from which the body had just been removed. Picking it up and opening it he found it to contain a single scrap of closely-written paper; and as he scanned it he started as though from an electric shock.

"Ben!" he shouted, hurrying after the Indian, who had moved on; "I say, Ben, look what I've found!"

The Indian waited for him to come up. "What you got?" he asked.

"A wallet, Ben, that must have dropped out of Bill Hoggins' pocket; and there's a paper in it that tells where the chest is!"

Ben's impassive face lighted up at this intelligence, and grasping the tattered scrap eagerly he slowly spelt out the crabbed words scrawled upon it:

*"Chist berryd on Blomdon beetch, ded mans cave barin
N. by E. Kape Splitt W. by wun pint N. mesur ten foot
N. from big stun lys purty deep."*

"Hooray!" shouted Hal; "it's safe then!"

"Ugh! mebbey," grunted Ben. "They take 'way, p'raps."

"We'll soon find out, at anyrate," said Hal.

The Indian shook his head. "No," he replied;

"this place other side bay. Plenty ice got. Spring come, then dig, not now. You keep paper safe."

Somewhat crestfallen, Hal took the paper and returned it to the wallet, which he stowed carefully away in an inner pocket. He had forgotten the fact that the bay was not navigable in winter.

"I'm sure it's there, Ben," he said after a short silence; "he wouldn't have kept the paper if it wasn't."

"Ugh! mebbby," was Ben's only reply as he set his snow-shoes in motion in the direction of home.

Little was said until they reached the Indian's hut at dusk, when, bidding his companion good-night, Hal directed his steps towards the Pratt homestead. On nearing the house he saw a sleigh standing before the door, and wondered who Mrs. Pratt's visitors could be. Millie, who had been eagerly watching for his return all the afternoon, rushed out bareheaded to meet him.

"Oh, Hal!" she cried, "I'm so glad you've come. And what do you think—grandpa's here!"

Though Hal had never seen Millie's grandfather, somehow the news of his arrival awakened in the boy's breast a strange sensation of dread.

"Who goes there? Stand, or I fire! Dead men's bones—bones—bones!" shrieked Lord Chancellor from his perch beside the fire as Hal entered the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HAL HEARS AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF NEWS.

THIS house, where he had parted for ever from little Tom, and where so much kindness had been shown him, had grown to seem very much like home to Hal, but never more so than to-night, after those terrible events in the woods. Mrs. Pratt's welcome, too, was so warm that his heart almost overflowed.

"Seems a'most like one o' my own boys—the good Lord keep 'em!—come back from sea, to see your face agin, sonny!" she exclaimed as she bustled about the tea-table. "'Pears like a whole week sence you went away on them snow-shoes. An' how've you bin? an' how's my man Eben?" she continued, rattling away regardless of replies; for Mrs. Pratt had a clipper-built tongue, as her husband often said. "Lan' sakes! what a storm we've had, to be sure, an' you 'way back in them woods through it all! An' father, he was out in it too. *Sech* a time es he had a-gettin' down, with the snow chin-deep a'most, an' the old mare flounderin' like a porkis. Beats me how ever he kem at all! Pull up your cheer, sonny; father's out to the barn givin' the mare a bite o' hay for the night, but he'll be back in a minnit."

How much longer the good woman would have spun it out is uncertain, had not the door opened at that moment to admit a man muffled to the eyes in a greatcoat. This Mrs. Pratt helped him to remove, saying as she bade him take a seat at the table:

"Father, this is the boy that's spendin' the winter with us. He's a good lad, Hal is."

The kitchen being but dimly lighted, until the stranger approached the table Hal was unable to distinguish his features, though something in the stoop of his shoulders seemed familiar and reawakened that nervous dread at the boy's heart. But as Mrs. Pratt concluded her little introductory speech the stranger turned his face full to the light, and Hal saw before him—Farmer Tomson!

He started from his seat in fear; but the farmer, after gazing at him for a moment in unfeigned surprise, advanced with outstretched hand, while Mrs. Pratt and Millie looked on open-mouthed.

"Hal—Hal Hungerford! the 'Nardo boy as run away from my house!" he exclaimed in tremulous tones. "Is it really you, lad, alive an' well? you es we all thought was drowned in thet storm! Wal, I *am* powerful glad to set eyes on you agin, an' no mistake! An' mother—why she'll jest fly into hysterics, she'll be thet overjied. Gi'me your hand, boy, an' tell me whatever on airth possessed you to go an' do it."

"Oh, sir," cried Hal, thinking the farmer alluded to the unfortunate affair at the circus, "I didn't do it! Someone else struck him not me."

"Wal, I never!" exclaimed the honest farmer. "Is it thet rumpus at the circus es is weighin' on your min'? Why, don't yer know what the cor'ner's vardick was?"

"No," said Hal; "I only know that everybody said I killed him, an' I didn't."

"Wal, now, jest listen to thet!" said the farmer, taking his seat at the tea-table and helping himself to a generous square of smoking buckwheat-cake. "The cor'ner's vardick, arter the pos'mortal inques', was that the man kem to his death by a sheath-knife; an' es nobody seen you stab the man, an' as I declared you had no sech knife, why, you was jest 'quitted, so to speak."

"And they won't put me in prison?" cried Hal, all trembling, and scarce believing that he heard aright."

"Bless you, lad, no!"

"Nor—nor hang me?"

"Hang you! I'd jest like to see the mother's son of 'em es ud dar' tetch you! No, boy, they'll do you no manner o' harm; an' what's more, the name o' Hal Hungerford's es clean an' es well-thought-of a name in the settlement to-day es the passon's himself. Why, what on airth's come over the boy?"

For Hal, overjoyed at the good news that his name had been freed from suspicion, had quite broken down. If he had said nothing all these months of the load which weighed upon his mind, he had thought much; and now that it was removed he sobbed like a child. Nor were the honest farmer's eyes without

the suspicion of a tear, though he attempted to account for the watery state of his vision by asserting that the tea was "bilin' hot." As for Mrs. Pratt and Millie, they gave vent to their sympathy with Hal as women ever will and men sometimes may.

"An' little Tom!" cried the farmer, thinking to turn the conversation into other channels—"whar's he? Bless me! I'd a'most forgot the little good-for-nothin'."

At this there was a fresh outburst; and when Millie crept to her grandfather's side and whispered that little Tom was dead, a solemn silence fell on the tearful group about the tea-table.

"The Lord's will be done!" said the farmer at last without any attempt to conceal his emotion. "On some 'counts he was a good-for-nothin', was little Tom; but he saved our Sarie Jane's life, an' thet won't be forgot where he's gone to, I reckon."

Gradually smiles returned to their faces, and cheerful talk began to flow, the farmer recounting in homely but forcible words the difficulties of his long journey over the snow-drifted roads, and Hal relating the events of the moose-hunt, and unconsciously making himself more of a hero than ever in the eyes of pretty Millie.

A sorrowful parting, a last lingering look at Millie as she stood in the doorway with the sunlight glinting on her hair, a long, cold ride over the snowy country, and Hal was back at the farm again. It had all been arranged that evening over the tea-table in

Mrs. Pratt's kitchen; and, consoled by a promise that Millie should visit her grandparents the following summer, Hal had gladly enough consented to return with Farmer Tomson to the settlement, where his name was now "as clean and as well-thought-of es the passon's."

Mother Tomson was jubilant—in a tearful way; for she could not yet think of little Tom without leaving great wet blotches on the striped jean apron.

"Father," she said at breakfast the morning after the arrival—"father, I jest can't b'ar the sight o' that strap on the wall."

"The tickler?" said Farmer Tomson in surprise. "Why not?"

"'Cause"—and Mother Tomson put her apron to her eyes—"cause whenever I sees it, 'pears like I hears that pore little good-for-nothin' a-cryin', an' I jest can't b'ar it!"

Farmer Tomson rose and removed the offending strap from its nail. "P'r'aps," he said huskily, drawing the leather through his hand with that old motion Hal remembered so well—"p'r'aps I wasn't allus jest in ticklin' little Tom. But the good Lord, He knows; an' if I did lay it on a leetle too hard sometimes, why, the pore lad ain't a-goin' to remember it agin' me now he's in glory. Pore little Tom! It *do* a'most seem he had orter cry when I takes this in my fist. An' if I was onjest, I ask him to forgive me. . . . What shell I do with the tickler, mother?"

"Burn it up, Abra'm," said Mother Tomson between her sobs.

THOUGHTS.

mise that
following
to return
where his
-of es the

ful way ;
without
n apron.
ing after
ht o' that

surprise.

apron to
rs like I
in', an' I

offending
huskily,
that old
I wasn't
Lord, He
ometimes,
agin' me
do a'most
n my fist.

between

THE LAST OF THE "TICKLER."

211

And the farmer, lifting one of the covers of the kitchen stove, solemnly consigned the "tickler" to the flames.

CHAPTER XXIV

HAL MAKES A NEW FRIEND OF AN OLD ENEMY.

A WHOLE year has passed since little Tom first opened the farm gate to admit Hal, and September has come again, ripe and sweet-scented as a golden russet apple.

For days past there has been more than ordinary activity in the farm kitchen, from which delectable odours have assailed the nostrils of chance passers-by, and squadrons of mottled plum-cakes, crisp doughnuts, luscious pumpkin, and juicy mince-pies have been convoyed under Mother Tomson's personal care to the adjoining pantry, whose long shelves groan beneath the weight of good things.

Hal is in high spirits and Mother Tomson in a flutter of grandmotherly solicitude; for to-day Millie is to arrive on that long-expected visit.

Ned Croft had that summer come into possession of a boat of his own, which he had christened the *Millie Pratt*, after his cousin, whom he insisted upon fetching from her home, in the boat which had been named in her honour. So, two days before, he had sailed away in high spirits at the prospect of such a trip. As the weather was unusually fine, and Croft was selfishly

jealous of any interference in the management of his boat, he went alone, in spite of Farmer Tomson's advice that he should take Hal with him.

Croft should have returned that morning. But when high-water came and brought no boat, expectancy gave place to disappointment in the Tomson kitchen, and disappointment to anxiety; for, as the day wore on, indications of a sudden and violent change in the weather grew more and more apparent.

Farmer Tomson stood at the kitchen door after tea and scanned the sky with anxious eyes. "Hal," said he, "them thar clouds hev a oncommon ugly look. What time's high-water to-night?"

"Ten o'clock, sir," replied Hal, who had consulted the almanac only a few minutes before.

"Then, if Ned gits here at all, he'll be in about thet time. I don't like yon sky. The win's fresh'nin', too, from the east'ard; an', if I don't miskalkilate, we're a-goin' to hev a spell o' weather—a reg'lar tearer mebby, seein' es it's jest about time for the 'noxial gales. 'Spose it'll come with the tide, es it allus des. Lucky thing we got that las' load of ma'sh hay up in time, for thet far dyke ain't any too strong ef thar's a-goin' to be a big tide. But it's Ned an' Millie I'm mos' consarned about."

"Ned surely wouldn't make for the river if he saw a storm coming," said Hal. "There are half a dozen safe places along the bay that he could run into instead."

"Thar air," said the farmer; "but Ned Croft's a dare-devilsome young feller in a boat—though I reckon

he ain't much in a fight; an' onct he took it into his head to run for the river, why he'd jest run for it, storm or no storm."

"If you'll let me, sir," said Hal eagerly, fully sharing in the farmer's anxiety, "I'll take the mare and ride over to the Point. If I sight Ned's boat before dark, any of the people there will take me off to her; and with two on board we ought to bring her safe in."

"Wal," replied the farmer, "I reckon you'd bes' go. Ride es fast es you kin, an' if Ned tries to make the river at all, you orter sight him afore dark. If you can't make the river, why jest run for the Pint ruther'n risk bein' upset. I'd go myself if I could borry them legs o' yours, my boy; but I'm gittin' old, an' I ain't wuth much on a pinch sech es this."

Hal lost no time in setting out, for he had six miles of road before him, and it would be dark in three-quarters of an hour. The old mare was anything but fast; but, urged by the frequent application of a stout switch, she got over the road at a pace which would have done credit to a younger animal. There was barely light enough to enable Hal to see the white-caps breaking on the bay when he drew rein on the edge of the sandy headland known as the Point.

A number of men were lounging about, smoking and talking over the weather prospects. One of them Hal recognized as a labourer who had been employed that summer on the farm.

"Have you seen anything of a boat in the bay?" he asked, accosting him.

"Ay," replied the man; "we've bin a-watchin' of

her this half hour back. Some durned fool as des'n't know thar's a storm comin', I guess, or he'd run for the Pint here, 'stead o' the river."

"Was she a white boat flying a small red flag?" asked Hal, leaping from the saddle.

"Thet's her," replied one of the other men, who had now come up; "an' beatin' about under fu' sail, into the bargain. A ticklish job she'll hev makin' the river agin this gale."

"Men," said Hal, "that's Ned Croft's boat. He's fetchin' his cousin Millie Pratt up from the Cape, and he hasn't a single hand aboard."

"Then he's a gone coon," observed one of the men; "for he'll never be able to handle her alone in the teeth of this wind."

"That's just it!" cried Hal; "I must get out to her somehow. Have you a boat here?"

"Ay, hev we," replied the man whom Hal had first addressed. "There's mine on the sands below here, an' if you want'er board thet craft out yonder, why, we're your men. Sandy, you look to the hoss. Come on, mates! It's on'y a half-hour's run thar an' back, with the wind abeam. Thet fool yonder's on the off tack now; but if he'd jest let her slide for the Pint, he'd be safe ashore in less'n no time."

With alacrity the men descended to the beach, and in a few minutes the good boat was racing over the waves, her larboard gunnel level with the foaming water. It was now so dark that objects in the offing could only be made out with difficulty. But before long one of the men sang out that he had sighted the

boat of which they were in search, half a mile or so to leeward, and now running on the opposite tack.

"Boat ahoy!" shouted one of the men when they came within hailing distance. "We've fetched someone to lend you a hand!"

Croft's only reply was to bring his boat up into the wind. In a few minutes the other boat was laid skilfully alongside, and with a light spring Hal was on board the *Millie Pratt*.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Croft gruffly, as the boats fell off before the wind and Hal stumbled aft.

"Yes," replied Hal, pressing Millie's hand silently where she lay, snugly wrapped up, in the stern. "Why don't you head for the Point?"

"'Cause I live up river, not at the Point; and I guess I can take my boat where I please," was Croft's surly answer.

"Take her where you please, by all means," said Hal, "if the wind will let you. But you've no right to take Millie into danger."

"See here," cried Croft angrily, "I'm master aboard this boat; and if you've come off here to find fault, you'd best go back, that's all."

Hal laughed. "Come, Ned," said he, "this is no time for quarrelling. I sha'n't find fault if you keep as firm a hand on your temper as you do on the tiller. I'll work the sails, and between the two of us we'll make the mouth of the river all right yet. Getting dark, isn't it?"

"I should say it was!" grumbled Croft.—"Lie low, there; she's coming round!—They're in a reg'lar stew

up at the farm 'cause I didn't get in this mornin', I s'pose? That's why you've come?"

"Yes," said Hal, and with that the conversation dropped.

A driving rain now set in, and the wind increased in violence perceptibly. The boat flew before the blast like a frightened sea-bird, heeling over until her boom was half under water. Had it not been for Hal's assistance, Croft's foolhardy venture must certainly have resulted in the loss of his own and Millie's lives. But at last, by dint of sheer daring, they succeeded in making the mouth of the river.

"There!" cried Croft exultantly as the boat swept by the Point and entered the more exposed portion of the river where the low, dyked marsh stretched away for a good mile on either hand. "I told you I'd do it, and I have!"

"Don't brag, Ned," said Hal quietly; "we're not home yet."

Scarcely had the words left his lips when there swept out of the darkness a furious gust of wind, the boat went over with a sudden lurch, and Hal found himself struggling in the black water, with Millie clinging to him desperately, and Ned Croft's hoarse cry ringing in his ears. Fortunately the river was narrow and almost free from the commotion of the wind-tossed outer bay. Hal, who was a good swimmer, struck out for the dyke, which he knew could not be far off. Encumbered though he was by Millie's weight, he reached it in less than a dozen strokes. To his consternation he found it almost under water, a few

narrow inches of the slippery mud being all that remained uncovered by the tide. Assisting Millie to scramble upon this, and bidding her remain motionless until his return, he struck out again for the spot where the boat had sunk, fearful from the cry which Croft had uttered that he had been struck down by a blow from the boom.

As he swam he shouted Croft's name again and again. But the fierce rush of the wind and the distant thunder of the waves on the beach were the only answer. It was intensely dark, so dark that he could scarcely see the water that rose to his very chin. Guessing as well as he could at the spot where the boat had gone down, he proceeded to swim round it, when suddenly his left arm came in contact with a floating body.

He could not see the face, but he knew it must be Croft—Croft, who had falsely accused him of a terrible crime and driven him from his home! He lay in the water motionless, senseless, perhaps dead. Bitter, evil thoughts rose in Hal's mind. Why risk his life in attempting to save this bully who had done him so great a wrong? Why not leave him to his fate?

Only a moment did Hal hesitate; then his better nature triumphed, and grasping Croft firmly by the collar he struck out once more for the dyke. He could hear Millie calling to him, and guided by the sound he reached the spot where she crouched, and with her assistance dragged the motionless form upon the slippery ledge. To his consternation he found that the tide had risen perceptibly in his brief absence.

The dyke was now within a hand's breadth of being entirely submerged.

To clamber down the inner slope of the dyke and seek safety in flight across the marsh was clearly impossible so long as Croft remained unconscious. Worse still, if the tide should overflow the dyke, the marsh would be invaded by a roaring flood, and that meant certain death. On the other hand, if they remained here, would the tide rise higher still, or had it already reached its greatest height?

Hal felt his way along the dyke to the left—the water was already pouring over it into the marsh below in a broad stream. He crept to the right—the overflow was deeper and stronger. He returned to the narrow ledge where Millie crouched beside her unconscious cousin, and with his hand measured the distance from its edge to the water. The distance had decreased in his absence. The tide was still rising!

Suddenly, with a roar that shook the dyke beneath their feet, that portion of the embankment which Hal had last examined went down before the mighty pressure of the tide, and the flood swept unchecked over the marsh. Yard after yard of the dyke crumbled away and thundered into the darkness below, until they stood on the brink of an abyss of maddened waters, in which the strongest man would have been no more than a mere straw. Would the few inches of clay beneath their feet also give way?

Supporting Millie with one arm, Hal waited. If the worst came he would at least make one last effort to save her. But the moments passed, the flood roared

on into the tempestuous darkness, and still the dyke remained firm; and at length when Hal stooped to ascertain the height of the water, with a great thrill of joy he found it had fallen, and knew they were saved!

After a time Croft recovered consciousness, and all night long they crouched upon the wet clay, at times almost swept off the dyke by the fury of the storm, yet cheering each other with hopes of speedy rescue when the day should come. And when at last the tardy dawn crept up from the east and they were seen from the Point, with what joy did they hail the approach of the boat which was to bear them away from the cheerless scene of their never-to-be-forgotten adventure.

The Saxby gale and tidal wave are still fresh in the memory of thousands on that coast. But of all who looked into the grim eyes of death that night, none, perhaps, have better cause to remember its horrors than Millie, Hal, and Hal's staunch friend, Ned Croft. Many years have passed since then; but even now they never speak of it without reverently ejaculating the only words they uttered when, in the gray morning, they saw the boats coming towards them across the flooded marshes—"Thank God!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"SQUIRE HAL."

BEFORE we take Hal by the hand, and looking into his honest brown eyes wish him a last adieu, a few words about one or two persons who have crossed our path in these pages.

The captain of the *Nancy Lee*, and King Cole the hermit, were tried and sentenced to penal servitude, the former exchanging the cabin of his snug schooner for a prison cell, the latter his shell-trimmed crown for a convict's cap. No more tobacco and rum, no more "dead men's bones," for the brutal smuggler and his cunning accomplice!

Poor Ben Christmas! That memorable moose-hunt proved his last; for, some ten days after Hal's departure from Mrs. Pratt's, Ben, having transported the proceeds of the hunt to his hut with his son's assistance, proceeded to the settlement, where he disposed of the hides to such bad purpose that he became reel-ing drunk, and in this condition started for home. Unhappily, the night being bitterly cold, not even the unusual quantity of "fire-water" Ben had swallowed could keep out the frost; and next morning the poor Indian was found stretched by the roadside lifeless,

but still clinging to his beloved bottle. His death-bed was a snow-drift, the stars of the keen winter night the only watchers.

As for Hal himself, his adventures were the making of him, and every year he grew to be more and more of a man. His evenings were spent in study, his days in painstaking labour; and to good purpose, for he soon became so expert in farming that Farmer Tomson deemed him to be worth more than his mere "keep," and so put him on man's wages. Hal's expenses were few, and he saved steadily. The treasure-chest, too, was in due time recovered, and what remained of its contents proved a neat nest-egg which on Hal's twenty-first birthday hatched into a trim, well-stocked farm of his own.

But in his prosperity he did not forget the favourite maxim of his old friend Ben Christmas, that "white boy and Injun are all one brother;" and in a sheltered corner of the new farm may be seen a neat cottage, where young Ben and his squaw mother live in comfort and plenty. "Make money," Hal is often heard to say; "make all you can—but above all make it do good."

Eight years pass. The bell of the old meeting-house rings a merry peal—startled, perhaps, from its usual lazy ding-dong by the appearance of so many people. Long rows of family waggons fringe the roadside fences, which the horses gnaw impatiently, while their owners laugh and chat and crowd into the church until there is no longer standing room.

Climb the narrow stair to the gallery and take a peep at the folk below. There are our old friends, Squire Purdy—he who took Hal's oath on the almanac, you remember,—and his son Joe. The Squire has grown stouter, and his "lucid interval" shows plainer than ever; while Joe's freckled face is still as suggestive of mackerel and his jaws of dulse-eating as they were eight years ago.

Yonder in the front pew is Mrs. Pratt, and by her side Mother Tomson, radiant and rosy, her jean apron replaced by a glistening silk gown, turned expressly for the occasion. Farmer Tomson, too, looking somewhat older, but very "spruce" in a spick-and-span new suit of gray home-spun, covered with enormous horn buttons which shine like full moons!

What is going on in the old church to-day? It is Wednesday, not Sunday; and, besides, the best sermon that was ever echoed by these old walls could not draw such a crowd as this. Why do all these honest country folk leave their work to gather here on a week-day, and in their Sunday clothes? Clearly something unusual is afoot!

Presently a loud whisper of "They're a-comin'!" runs through the expectant assembly, and all eyes are turned towards the open door. And now the secret is out; for walking proudly up the aisle, with blushing Millie Pratt on his strong arm, comes Hal. For Hal is Millie's hero still; and presently, when the soberly-clad minister comes forward and reads the marriage service, he is something more.

Then the crowd pours out; and as Hal helps Millie

into the waggon which is to convey her to her new home, three ringing cheers—in which let us join with right good-will—are given for "Squire Hal and his bride!"

THE END.

her new
join with
l and his